Going the extra mile

Australian water activist finishes epic 200th marathon in a year

WORLD, PAGE 12

Debt recast plan lifts property hopes

BUSINESS, PAGE 13

Traditional craft

Inheritor of intangible heritage turns sorghum stalks into artworks LIFE, PAGE 18

CHINA DAILY

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XI'S VISION | A SHARED FUTURE

China expands its toolbox for global unity

Initiatives reflect Beijing's commitment to community with a shared future

By ZHANG YUNBI
zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

Over the past 10 years, many policy researchers have found that China has remained true to its word on its commitment to building a community with a shared future for mankind.

To achieve this major vision, Beijing has added to its huge toolbox, putting forward and developing a range of detailed blueprints and initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Global Development Initiative.

In the past decade, the BRI alone "has galvanized nearly $1 trillion of investment, established more than 3,000 cooperation projects, created 420,000 local jobs and helped lift almost 40 million people out of poverty", State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang told reporters earlier this month.

At the heart of these ambitious Chinese blueprints is the nation's unchanged belief that countries can and should get along well with one another and the global community needs teamwork and unity, officials and scholars said.

When speaking at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in March 2013, President Xi Jinping observed that mankind, living in the same global village, has increasingly emerged as a community with a shared future in which everyone's interests are closely entwined.

After that, he proposed the Belt and Road Initiative, also in 2013, the Global Development Initiative in 2021, the Global Security Initiative last year, and the Global Civilization Initiative on March 15. The GDI alone has won the support of more than 100 countries and international organizations, including the United Nations.

"All these have enriched our vision for a community with a shared future for mankind and provided practical pathways toward it," Xi said in a signed article published in Russian media on Monday. "They are part of China's response to the changes of the world, of our times, and of the historic trajectory."

The community vision has been incorporated many times in key documents such as resolutions and joint statements focusing on global governance, including those of the United Nations and the BRICS grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Vice-Foreign Minister Xie Feng said earlier this year that "the past 10 years has witnessed this vision displaying increasing power of truth and enormous potential in practice. ... Building a community with a shared future for mankind is not an empty concept, but enriched practices".

China is working with various countries to translate the GDI into reality and stepping up efforts on the high-quality development of the Belt and Road, he noted.

In addition, the GSI proposed by Xi "is an innovative measure for responding to international security challenges and tackling fundamental issues concerning the world's lasting tranquility", he said.

"All countries are entitled to prosper, and the success of all is the best of all," Xie added.

He also called for greater joint efforts among countries to further fulfill common development, security, openness, values and responsibility for tackling growth deficits, achieving peace, deepening win-win cooperation, building bridges among cultures and securing international strategic stability.

Cui Hongjian, director of the China Institute of International Studies' European studies department, said that "there has been a growing maturity of China's overall thinking and proposals in advancing the building of a community with a shared future for mankind".

Beijing's proposals have been reaching deeper and moving closer to the fundamental parts of global governance through the introduction, one after another, of the GDI, the GSI and the GCI, Cui said.

See *Efforts*, page 3

Chinese autos on display

A visitor takes a selfie inside a Denza D9 MPV at the 44th Bangkok International Motor Show in Thailand on Wednesday. A number of Chinese auto brands appeared at the show, which kicked off on Wednesday and will continue till April 2. WANG TENG / XINHUA

Support for TikTok

Supporters of TikTok rally at the US Capitol in Washington, DC, on Wednesday, a day before the House of Representatives was to hold a hearing with TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew on the platform's consumer privacy and data security practices and its impact on children.
J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE / AP **See story, page 10**

HIGHER GROUND

Nation urged to boost domestic demand

By ZHOU LANXU
zhoulanxu@chinadaily.com.cn

China needs to further boost its domestic demand while addressing weak links in its financial system in order to prepare for any potential misstep by the US Federal Reserve that could worsen the recent banking turmoil, policy advisers and experts said on Thursday.

They noted that the risk of a substantial economic slowdown and more bank failures in the United States is rising as the Fed walks a tightrope between curbing inflation and ensuring financial stability, although a global financial crisis remains unlikely.

As mounting external uncertainties could dampen China's export growth and roil investor sentiment, it is necessary for policymakers to maintain adequate support for domestic demand and take preemptive steps to strengthen the domestic financial safety net with smaller banks, real estate enterprises and local government debts in focus, they said.

On Wednesday, the Fed raised its benchmark interest rate by 25 basis points, to the range of 4.75 percent to 5 percent, signaling its priority to bring down inflation even as aggressive rate hikes in the past year triggered the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank.

As the Fed continues to increase interest rates, the combination of higher borrowing costs and reduced access to credit has raised the chances of a hard landing for the US economy, said James Knightley, chief international economist at Dutch bank ING.

According to Knightley, the stress created by the SVB failure could make US banks more nervous about whom they lend to, and thus hamper US credit expansion and economic prospects.

If the risk of a substantial US recession materializes, China's exports and economic recovery could come under pressure, said Hu Zhihao, deputy director of the National Institution for Finance and Development, a Chinese think tank.

"While this situation is not the baseline scenario, it is still important for China to put its policies to expand domestic demand on standby and launch more measures to boost market players' confidence," Hu said.

In a sign that policymakers are stepping up efforts to protect economic recovery from external uncertainties, the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, will cut the reserve requirement ratio on Monday to replenish banking system liquidity and facilitate credit growth.

Wu Liyuan, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics, said it is also necessary to ramp up efforts to address the weak links in China's financial system, which could bear the brunt if the overseas bank turmoil leads to a crisis in other areas.

Wu said that speeding up the restructuring of the real estate industry and providing liquidity support to smaller banks that are under stress would be particularly helpful, and called for efforts to boost the funding for deposit insurance and improve relevant legislation and regulations.

Experts noted that the spillover of the US banking upheaval should be manageable for China, considering the actions taken by US authorities to reduce risk contagion and the robustness of China's large banking institutions.

Wang Qian, Vanguard's Asia-Pacific chief economist, said that risks of a full-blown banking crisis appear small, given that US and European banks are well capitalized overall.

Moreover, China's prudence in capital account opening and limited exposure to overseas banks can help restrict a financial risk spillover, said Wang, who has maintained the projection of the nation's annual economic growth at 5.3 percent.

"Just as we think the recent developed market financial stress is contained, so is the fallout on China's macro outlook," said Louise Loo, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Economics.

New central department to help modernize country's social governance

By LI LEI
lilei@chinadaily.com.cn

The Communist Party of China Central Committee has unveiled its new Social Work Department, which experts said is part of a broader effort to modernize the country's social governance and better handle complaints and proposals from the public.

The new department is tasked with leading work in fields such as promoting voluntary services, training social workers, responding to public complaints, managing industrial associations and administrating grassroots communities.

A range of government and Party departments were formerly responsible for handling work in these areas, including the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council and the Central Guidance Commission on Building Spiritual Civilization.

Guan Xinping, director of the Institute of Social Construction and Management of Nankai University in Tianjin, said that bringing together such "social governance and service functions" in one unified department will help to boost efficiency and curb bureaucracy.

The former situation, in which this work was spread across a number of different departments, had increased costs in terms of cross-departmental coordination.

"The civil affairs ministry took care of grassroots governance, the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee was in charge of Party-building issues, and security matters were overseen by the Political and Legal Affairs Commission," he said.

The creation of the Social Work Department was outlined in an institutional reform plan issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, China's Cabinet, and released to the public on March 16 by Xinhua News Agency.

See *Social work*, page 3

PART-TIME TRAINERS ENJOY BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Skills passed on to students, additional income earned

indepth

By YANG FEIYUE
yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Han Lu, who has just turned 40, danced enthusiastically to music at a gym in Jinan, Shandong province, while shouting instructions to a roomful of her followers.

Wearing a loose white jacket and green cargo pants, and with her hair cut short, she appeared to have boundless energy as she offered words of encouragement during an intense training session last month.

Han is just one of many people regularly attending gyms in China whose passion for exercise has led to them becoming part-time fitness trainers.

"It feels good to keep active when night falls. It's also exciting to have people working out with me as we have fun together," she said.

During the day, Han works as a professor at Shandong University of Finance and Economics, specializing in sustainable urban development.

"My teaching job is much more traditional than my work in the evening," she said, adding that both roles complement each other well, and she enjoys her lifestyle.

See *Trainers*, page 2

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VISIT…

LANZAROTE Caliente.COM

PAGE TWO

Wang Zixiang (front row, second right) poses with his trainees after a fitness class in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Trainers: Sports tech companies seek recruits

From page 1

Han started going to the gym and working with a private trainer in 2013 as a way of "letting off steam" after work.

Taking her first group training session three years later, she was immediately drawn to the vibrant atmosphere.

"The pumping music and synchronous moves of those taking part in the session inspired me," she said.

Han first started exercising with sessions of Body Combat, a high-energy workout inspired by martial arts, but as her experience grew, she became a group trainer.

In 2020, she took part in The One, an online competition hosted by Les Mills, one of the world's leading developers of group workouts, but her relatively low score meant she failed to finish in the top five. Han won a prize in every contest she entered before The One Competition.

"This is an important competition, with hundreds of trainers nationwide competing for the top five places," she said. "But I was frustrated with my performance, which triggered self-doubts over my age and physical condition."

"Before becoming a trainer, I always believed that as long as I gave 100 percent, there was nothing I couldn't achieve," she said.

"I decided to switch my focus to the Body Jam and Body Pump categories in The One competition to increase my chances of getting a better result."

In 2021, Han made the short list for both categories, and last year she triumphed in the Body Jam section.

"It was proof that practice makes perfect, despite the fact that I made a clumsy start to the competition," she said.

Being a trainer not only offers her a healthy lifestyle, it has also resulted in positive feedback from her followers.

She was touched when some of her students approached her as the gym class resumed after lockdowns imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"They told me they had been following me online to exercise at home, and wanted to take a photo with me. I was especially thrilled when I heard this," she said.

Sports technology companies such as Hilefit, Keep and Supermonkey are seeking more part-time trainers working flexible hours as people become increasingly aware of the need to protect their health by exercising.

Xia Dong, cofounder of Hilefit, said the interest in home exercise triggered by singer Liu Genghong, also known as Will Liu, who launched online fitness sessions on the Douyin short-video platform last year, is proof of the public's strong desire to be more active. Liu's Douyin account has attracted 70 million followers and 170 million "likes".

The increased demand for exercise has opened the door for more people who have a full-time job to tap their sports potential and become influencers in fitness groups.

Xia said, "Our trainers come from all walks of life, ranging from product managers, advertising planners and those from State-owned companies.

Han Lu wins the Body Jam championship at The One competition last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Wang Zixiang instructs trainees during a Body Combat session. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Being a trainer brings them additional income and helps them discover a different side to themselves."

Program launched

In 2017, Hilefit launched a program aimed at those wanting to take exercise a step further. The program covers sports theories and practical skills, and participants can lead a class if they meet certain standards.

For example, Wang Zixiang, 30, from Shenzhen, Guangdong province, passed the Fat Burner class test in May to become a Hilefit class trainer.

He was attracted to a group training class in 2021 after discovering that a friend with a weight problem had got back in shape.

"I hadn't seen him for a while, and was surprised to learn he had been taking a group training class at Hilefit," Wang said.

Wasting no time, Wang signed up for a session, and was immediately impressed by the trainer's energy on stage.

Wang even quit his job at a private equity company to find less stressful work at a coffee shop so he could better concentrate on losing weight and improving his health.

"My work at the equity company involved a lot of socializing, and I put on a lot of weight, but this served to rekindle my passion for a healthy lifestyle," he added.

At school, Wang loved playing soccer, and he has also tried his hand at diving and boxing. However, he felt hampered by his sedentary lifestyle.

"I had difficulty keeping up with the training class at first, even when lifting the lightest barbell, and my body ached afterward," he said, adding that this encouraged him to keep going.

> "My work at the equity company involved a lot of socializing, and I put on a lot of weight, but this served to rekindle my passion for a healthy lifestyle."
>
> **Wang Zixiang,** Hilefit class trainer from Shenzhen, Guangdong province

After a month, he no longer ached, and Wang said his trainer's words of encouragement motivated him.

"It was clear that my stamina and cardiopulmonary strength had improved," he said.

After 18 months of exercise, Wang decided to become a trainer. "I consider myself a person who likes to commit fully to whatever I get involved in," he said.

Wang took 10 private classes, during which he realized that a trainer needs to control the pace and atmosphere of a session.

"You have to ensure that everyone is up to speed and avoids injury. You also need to be positive, no matter whether your stocks have just plummeted, or you have gone through a tough romantic breakup," he said.

Now taking two group classes a day at Hilefit stores about 50 kilometers from each other, Wang said he greatly enjoys his new routine.

"I need to set an example for my students, so I have to be self-disciplined in terms of diet and exercise," he said.

He arrives an hour before his class to exercise on his own, and to date, Wang has lost more than 20 kilograms. His students, who have given him positive feedback, follow his instructions carefully.

Wang's experience as a trainer has also inspired him to keep challenging himself. "I'll try to enter more competitions to hone my skills and work my way up to take bigger classes," he said.

Wang is one of many who have joined professional training sessions offered by tech-powered gyms.

Xia, the Hilefit cofounder, said the company conducted more than 2,000 training sessions in 2021, which attracted 30,000 participants.

Since being founded in 2015, Hilefit has produced more than 300 trainers. These trainers have helped coach prospective part-time fitness instructors who have gone on to open their own gyms, Xia added.

Supermonkey and Keep have also introduced career development options for their part-time trainers.

Last year, Chen Danqin, who comes from Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang province, attracted online attention when she won the Body Combat category in The One competition. Chen, who trained at Hilefit, said, "Being a trainer has enabled me to continue my self-development, tap my potential, and try something I never dreamed of."

She attributes her progress to the encouragement received from her fellow trainers and followers.

Xia, who believes the rise of part-time trainers is good news for the fitness industry, said, "It means more professionals are joining this field."

As many part-time trainers have advanced educational backgrounds, they have brought more possibilities to the sector.

Additional skills

Yao Ning, co-founder of 3HFIT, an education, certification and career planning agency for trainers, said its new training intake includes a livestreaming host, a nutritionist, social group operator and a sales representative.

When a trainer has additional skills to offer, the number of his or her followers rises and stronger bonds are formed, Yao added.

Han, from Jinan, recently took a trip to New Zealand, where she was inspired by the enthusiasm for exercise, which convinced her to continue as a part-time trainer. During her visit, she saw trainers in their 50s exercising vigorously.

"I think training is an inclusive and diverse field, and everyone involved in it should identify themselves as One plus X," Han said.

"One represents your real job, or who you really are, while X refers to factors such as personality, sideline occupations, or roles."

Han, who considers her roles as a professor and trainer to be a perfect combination, said she sometimes confuses the two jobs "because they are not that much different".

"One of these occupations helps people tone their bodies, while the other forms character and cultivates a life trajectory," she said.

Han believes a good trainer can also serve as a role model — not just during classes, but in daily life.

Han Lu (top) and Chen Danqin complete moves during The One competition last year in Shanghai.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

China opposes US' reported action on TikTok

Ministry: Govt to make decision on sale of video app's stake according to law

By LIU ZHIHUA
liuzhihua@chinadaily.com.cn

The Ministry of Commerce said on Thursday that if TikTok's parent company ByteDance is forced to sell its stake in the popular video-sharing app, the Chinese government will decide whether or not to grant its approval solely based on Chinese laws and regulations.

Ministry spokeswoman Shu Jueting said at a news conference that China is aware of media reports that the United States government is demanding ByteDance to sell its stake in TikTok or face a possible ban.

"Selling the stake or splitting TikTok from the Chinese parent company involves technology export and must follow Chinese laws and regulations to proceed for administrative approval. The Chinese government will make a decision in accordance with the law," she said.

"If the news reports turn out to be true, the US decision would be based on TikTok's foreign ownership, rather than its products and services, which will severely damage confidence of foreign investors in the US, including those from China," Shu said, adding that China strongly opposes the reported move.

Citing so-called national security concerns, the administration of US President Joe Biden reportedly asked ByteDance to sell TikTok, which is an overseas version of Douyin in China, or face a nationwide ban in the US.

Late last month, the White House required all US federal agencies to remove TikTok from their phones and systems within 30 days, while Canada announced it is banning TikTok from all government-issued mobile devices.

Meanwhile, Shu said the US should remove additional tariffs on Chinese goods, relax controls on exports to China and lift trade restrictions on Chinese companies as soon as possible, to create favorable conditions for bilateral trade cooperation and reduce the US' trade deficit with China. She added that China has never deliberately pursued a trade surplus with the US.

The tariffs were originally imposed by former US president Donald Trump. "A typical unilateral and trade protection measure, the US Section 301 tariffs disrupt normal bilateral trade between China and the US, damage global industrial and supply chain stability and deeply harm American importers and consumers," Shu said.

The US' trade deficit with China is determined by multiple factors including the economic structures of the two countries, the international division of labor and US controls on exports to China, she said. The US' overall trade deficit has been expanding in recent years, while the growth rate of its trade deficit with China is significantly lower.

US importers carried almost the entire burden of the additional tariffs placed on Chinese goods, raising costs for US companies, according to a recent report by the independent US International Trade Commission. The report found an almost one-to-one increase in the price of US imports following the imposition of the tariffs.

Shu stressed that US-China economic and trade cooperation is mutually beneficial, as Chinese enterprises import a large number of agricultural products, automobiles, high-tech products, energy and petrochemicals from the US. China's exports to the US have benefited the country's consumers, strengthened the competitive advantages of downstream enterprises and lowered inflation.

She also said China looks forward to having constructive discussions with Brazil on deepening economic and trade cooperation. Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is scheduled to visit China from Sunday to Friday.

Bilateral trade between the countries reached $171.49 billion in 2022, data from the ministry showed.

China has been Brazil's largest trading partner for 14 consecutive years, while the South American country is the largest exporter of soybeans, chicken and sugar to China.

China is also an important source of foreign direct investment for Brazil. Bilateral investment cooperation has been steadily advancing, covering a wide range of fields such as manufacturing, energy and mining, agriculture and infrastructure.

Show of skills

A nurse demonstrates her skills during a competition in Huai'an, Jiangsu province, on Wednesday. Forty contestants representing 20 delegations from across the province participated in the two-day event, which started on Tuesday at Jiangsu College of Nursing. ZHAO QIRUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Peng calls for increased intl cooperation in TB fight

Peng Liyuan, wife of President Xi Jinping and also the World Health Organization goodwill ambassador for tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, on Wednesday called on all parties to jointly improve global tuberculosis prevention and treatment.

To this end, all parties should actively fulfill their commitments, increase resource input, carry out exchanges and cooperation, and share prevention and treatment experience, Peng said in a written speech shared at WHO activities commemorating 2023 World Tuberculosis Day.

In recent years, thanks to the WHO's hard work and the joint efforts of the international community, the world has made notable progress in the fight against tuberculosis.

The Chinese government attaches great importance to tuberculosis prevention and treatment and has incorporated it into the Healthy China strategy, said Peng. China has been constantly improving the support level, carrying out multisector cooperation, engaging the participation of the whole of society, and actively promoting new diagnostic techniques, therapeutic solutions and management tools, she added. As a result, the tuberculosis cure rate in the country has stayed above 90 percent.

Peng said that since her participation in tuberculosis prevention and treatment efforts began over a decade ago, she has witnessed steady progress in this field in China, as well as the growth of volunteer teams in the country.

The volunteers have been actively spreading knowledge on tuberculosis prevention and treatment, providing assistance and support to patients, and creating a positive environment that encourages the participation of the whole of society, Peng said.

Noting that there are many respectable and admirable volunteers around the world, Peng said that she is moved by their selfless dedication and would like to express her sincere gratitude to them.

Tuberculosis remains a global public health problem that seriously endangers people's health, and there is still a long way to go to end the global tuberculosis epidemic, she said.

Peng said she is willing to join hands with all parties to actively participate in tuberculosis prevention and treatment, care for tuberculosis patients and safeguard people's health.

She also expressed her belief that with concerted efforts, the goal of ending the tuberculosis epidemic will be achieved as scheduled and greater contributions will be made to building a global community of health for all.

XINHUA

Encounter with science

Students admire a robotic vehicle during a science and technology festival at a primary school in Qingdao, Shandong province, on Thursday. The festival featured more than 10 science programs to stimulate students' interest in science and technology. WANG HAIBIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Nation shares water-governance practices

By MINLU ZHANG
at the United Nations
minluzhang@chinadailyusa.com

Minister of Water Resources Li Guoying said on Wednesday that China adheres to the new development concept of innovation, coordination, going green, openness and sharing, and the country has made great progress in realizing the water-related goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Li made the remarks in a speech at the United Nations Water Conference, the organization's first such event in almost five decades, which runs through Friday at its headquarters in New York.

The minister, who is leading a delegation of water experts to the conference, said China has fully implemented its national water-saving action plan. With only 6 percent of the world's freshwater resources, the country has guaranteed water supply for nearly 20 percent of the global population and generated more than 18 percent of the world's total economic output, he said.

Among the major progress China has made in terms of implementing the water-related goals of the UN 2030 Agenda is the promotion of the integration of urban and rural water supply networks, the centralized water supply system and the standardized construction of small-scale water projects, Li said while addressing the general debate at the conference's plenary session.

The country has fully implemented the mechanism of river and lake chiefs, a network of leading officials responsible for monitoring the condition of specific water bodies. There are 1.2 million such officials performing these duties across the country, Li said.

"China also actively promotes international exchanges and cooperation, and continues to support developing countries in improving water governance and water supply capabilities," he added.

Based on the country's practices and experiences in implementing the water-related goals of the 2030 Agenda, Li put forward four proposals.

First, efforts should be made to ensure the basic right of all people to have access to safe drinking water, especially those living in remote rural areas that are affected by poverty and drought.

"Residents of remote villages cannot obtain this right solely through individual efforts. Governments, social organizations and even the international community should provide support and assistance for equitable access to this basic right," the minister said.

Li's second proposal involves full understanding of the finiteness and irreplaceability of freshwater resources.

"This requires residents of the global village to jointly fulfill the obligations and responsibilities of sustainably utilizing freshwater resources, and to actively promote and realize agricultural water conservation and efficiency enhancement, industrial water conservation and emission reduction, and urban energy conservation," he said.

His third proposal is to "respect the basic rights of rivers in nature, regard rivers as life forms, construct river ethics, maintain the healthy life of rivers and realize the harmonious coexistence of people and rivers".

Fourth, he said that facing the challenges of the intensifying global climate change and its impact, it is necessary to fully utilize the role of UN agencies and provide a platform for communication and collaboration among governments, international organizations, think tanks, social organizations and other stakeholders to participate in the global response to climate change according to their respective strengths.

This will enable the gathering of wisdom and strength to address water disasters and tackle problems in such issues as water resources, water environment and water ecology, he added.

About 6,000 people from more than 200 countries and international organizations are attending the UN Water Conference.

The three-day event will have six plenary meetings, five interactive dialogue meetings and more than 200 side meetings, marking the midterm comprehensive review of the implementation of the objectives of the International Decade for Action on Water for Sustainable Development (2018-28), according to the UN.

Efforts: Viable path helps boost global development

From page 1

"All these efforts are refocusing global attention and efforts to address one common ultimate question — achieving security and development in the whole world," he added.

From the GSI to the specific documents proposed by China recently, including the position paper on a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, China has made relentless, earnest efforts to offer Chinese solutions to global security governance, Cui said.

"Only by doing so will it be possible to see many of the existing hot spot issues eased or resolved and to see the climate for development in the world improve," he said.

Zhang Yuyan, director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that building a community with a shared future for mankind is "a viable path for perfecting global governance".

"Currently, the international community is confronted with, and should deal with, worsening deficits in peace, development, security and governance," he said.

"It should be noted that China's efforts in seeking modernization will also face greater challenges and obstacles if such thorny issues haunting the whole of mankind are not resolved," he added.

Building a community with a shared future for mankind is in line with the natural law of economics when it comes to the division of labor in the global context, he said.

"As a major economic player in the world, China benefits from the international division of labor, and it contributes considerably to the world economy in return," he added.

Officials and scholars said that China in the future will, as always, remain committed to its global vision, earnestly participate in the global governance agenda and make greater contributions to advancing peace and development in the world as well as the progress of the whole of mankind.

Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the UN, said it will be important for China to make further efforts in overall planning and coordinating to advance the series of major initiatives and proposals put forward by Xi.

"We need to build a full-fledged, multidimensional framework that is aimed at building a community with a shared future for mankind through comprehensively advancing the BRI, the GDI and the GSI," he said.

Social work: Expert welcomes greater attention to sector

From page 1

The departments of the CPC Central Committee include the Organization Department, overseeing personnel affairs, the Publicity Department, the United Front Work Department and the International Liaison Department.

The Social Work Department was created 17 years after the CPC decided at a key Party meeting in 2006 to foster a team of professional social workers. The effort was aimed at modernizing social governance by delegating some public duties to organizations capable of offering professional services, such as care for the elderly, through means of government contracts.

Guan estimated that more than 300 colleges nationwide have social work-related majors and more than 100 of them offer master's degrees for social work. There are about 1.7 million social workers across the country.

The professor said that quality development applies not only to the economic sector, but also to social issues. "The quality development of society must be supercharged by a strong social work sector."

Guan said he was glad to see that the latest institutional overhaul — which also includes the creation of a financial commission and a science and technology commission — ranks social work alongside the traditionally important fields of finance and technology.

In recent years, some more developed areas of the country, such as Beijing and Shanghai, have created social work commissions to lead such work. Experts said that the success in those areas has partly paved the way for creating the Social Work Department.

In addition, the CPC Central Committee has placed work related to handling the public's complaints and proposals under the direct leadership of the new Social Work Department.

People's complaints and proposals have long served as an indication of public opinion. Work on handling these supplements the judicial system in terms of helping the public to safeguard its rights and report misconduct, and had usually been conducted through the National Public Complaints and Proposals Administration and its local divisions.

Guan said the decision to create the new department suggests that social work techniques could be employed to handle the public's complaints and proposals, which are usually lodged with government agencies in person in relation to an array of commercial, contractual and property disputes.

That is likely to make institutions handling the public's complaints and proposals less bureaucratic, enabling Party organizations to better communicate with the people. "In fact, work related to handling the public's complaints and proposals, which is part of the Party's mass work, is best carried out by officials with social work expertise," he said.

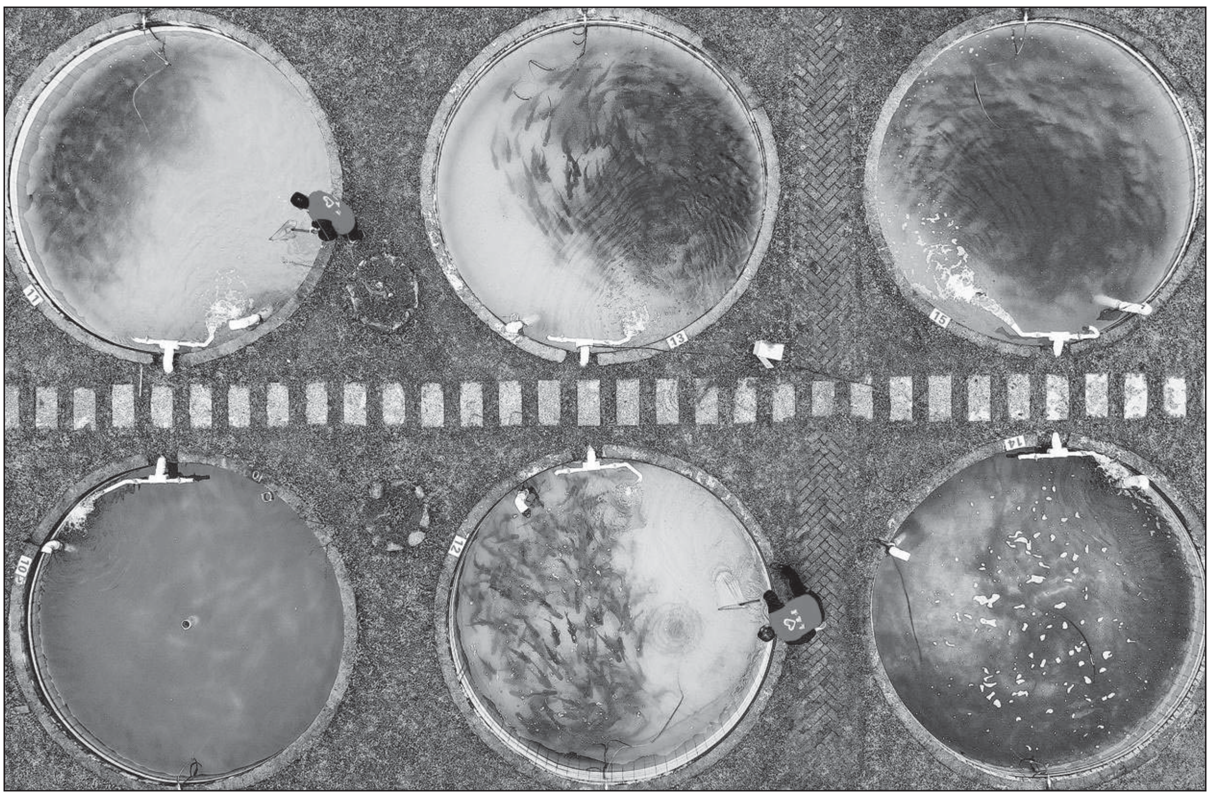
In an interview with China News Service, Shen Ronghua, a researcher with the Chinese Public Administration Society, said that the Party's direct leadership over affairs related to public complaints and proposals shows the job will be further strengthened.

The complaints and proposals collected from the people are expected to serve as a reference for the Party when it comes to policymaking in the social sector, he said.

Huang Ximing, assistant director of the China Philanthropy Research Institute of Beijing Normal University, told China Daily that bringing this work under the CPC Central Committee's direct leadership will contribute to solving some of the thorniest issues facing the public, and it also further strengthens the ties between the Party and the people.

CHINA

Pond life



Workers harvest fish on Wednesday from ponds filled with spring water diverted from Hengshan Mountain in Dengshan village, Hengshan, Hunan province. The village has built such ponds in recent years to enhance the fish quality and increase local incomes. GUO LILIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Early screening, treatment key to putting end to tuberculosis

Despite advances, concerted efforts still needed to overcome bacterial disease

By WANG XIAOYU
wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Although China has made exceptional progress in reducing tuberculosis in recent years, health experts said the sheer number of TB infections in the country remains large and concerted efforts in expanding early screening, subsidizing treatment and developing novel testing tools are needed to tackle the disease.

This Friday marks the 28th World Tuberculosis Day, which aims to raise public awareness about the infectious disease that claimed 1.6 million lives globally in 2021.

It is caused by a bacterium that usually attacks the lungs and can spread between people through tiny droplets exhaled by an infected person.

Peng Liyuan, wife of Chinese President Xi Jinping and the World Health Organization goodwill ambassador for TB and HIV/AIDS, said in a written speech on Wednesday that China has been actively promoting new diagnostic techniques, therapies and management tools, and as a result, the cure rate for TB patients has been maintained above 90 percent.

However, she added that TB remains a global public health issue and there is still a long way to go to end TB globally.

Zhao Yanlin, director of the TB prevention and control center at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said that TB domestically has been declining consistently in recent years, with the incidence rate falling from 104 per 100,000 people in 2001 to 55 per 100,000 people last year.

"The death rate has also been kept under 2.1 per 100,000 people, paralleling that in developed countries," he said in an interview this month.

Despite the notable progress, Zhao said China still has the world's third-largest TB burden after India and Indonesia. "Each day, about 2,000 new TB cases are reported in the country," he said.

Zhao said a serious challenge is to counter the rising rate of drug-resistant TB, which is usually caused by poor compliance with standard treatment regimens and is much harder and more expensive to treat.

"The key is detecting regular TB patients as early as possible and delivering standard treatment to prevent the disease from becoming resistant to medicines," he said.

To this end, Zhao said that special attention should be paid to key groups, such as students and close contacts of patients, as well as key venues such as schools, elderly care homes and crowded factories. "Meanwhile, health examinations required for school enrollment and employment can also be leveraged to identify TB cases," he said.

Lin Minggui, head of the infectious disease department at Beijing Tsinghua Changgung Hospital, said that he has always attached great significance to educating patients on strictly complying with treatment regimens that last at least two weeks.

"Persuading patients to increase their adherence to prescriptions and take drugs for a long period without suspension is vital to containing the occurrence of drug-resistant forms of TB," he said.

Lin added that new medicines and therapies should be administered promptly to patients infected with drug-resistant TB to control their symptoms and reduce the risk of transmission.

On Feb 23, the National Administration of Disease Prevention and Control released a circular aimed at strengthening the control of drug-resistant TB.

The document calls for enhanced communication and cooperation among hospitals, disease control centers and grassroots medical institutions to increase the compliance of TB patients and ensure their seamless management. It also requires all TB-designated hospitals at the district or county level to be capable of conducting convenient diagnostic tests for drug-resistant TB in the next three years.

Zhang Wenhong, head of the infectious disease department at Fudan University Huashan Hospital and a national political adviser, suggested setting up multipronged insurance policies for TB patients.

During this year's two sessions that concluded on March 13, he said that many patients stopped taking medicines due to financial strain. As a result, he suggested rolling out free treatment policies at the national level such as including all standard anti-TB drugs to the reimbursement list, as well as providing special assistance for TB patients from low-income or impoverished families and exempting medical expenses for drug-resistant TB cases.

Dong Xiaoping, chief virologist at the China CDC and a national political adviser, said that homegrown diagnostic kits for TB have not reached a first-rate level yet globally.

To end the disease, new technologies that can facilitate the detection of TB patients at an early stage and evaluate outcomes of treatment are important, he added.

Survey allows experts to assess risks of disaster

By LI HONGYANG
lihongyang@chinadaily.com.cn

Managing disaster risks has been key to mitigating the impacts of climate change and improving the resilience of human society, and the survey on natural disaster risks nationwide has provided crucial support, according to the China Meteorological Administration.

The management involves exploring consequences such as those that might be caused by 50 millimeters of rainfall hitting an area crisscrossed with rivers or an area with steep slopes and loose soil.

It also explores the impacts of temperatures above 37 C in places not prone to such weather.

In February, China released its survey results on the integrated risk of natural disasters, the first of its kind in the country aiming to help prevent disasters in the future.

The National Disaster Reduction Commission told a news conference that the results reveal the hidden risks posed by natural disasters and disaster resistance capacity in some key regions.

In 2020, the State Council, China's Cabinet, started the survey in which nearly 5 million professionals and technical staff members from across the country took part.

They obtained data about the factors that can lead to disasters such as earthquakes, extreme weather, floods and droughts, and forest and grassland fires. They also collected data related to population, housing, infrastructure, public service systems, resources and the environment.

Meteorological departments at national, provincial, city and county levels set up disaster risk survey groups.

They formed 20 technical specifications for surveying and assessed the zoning of 10 disaster types.

The survey results on natural disasters have been applied in some regions.

Last year, the Chongqing meteorological service identified areas that are vulnerable to rainstorm disasters, including scenic spots and agricultural parks, and equipped them with monitoring and warning systems.

Since 2020, villages in Yunnan province that are more likely to suffer from thunder and lightning disasters have been assessed and rated according to their risk levels.

About 94 percent of Yunnan's land area is mountainous with a high incidence of thunderstorms, the provincial meteorological service said.

The service has provided data and materials to designers and builders to help them mitigate the impacts of thunder and lightning in their work.

The Liaoning meteorological service investigated the agricultural meteorological conditions and production of crops in the province to solve disasters caused by low temperatures.

Forecast services for low-temperature frost that may cause damage to crops — based on a historical database of low-temperatures recorded by categories of county and time period — have been provided to local farmers.

Building blocks

The first tank of concrete is poured for the unit 4 reactor at the Sanmen nuclear power plant in Taizhou, Zhejiang province, on Wednesday. The single unit is expected to generate 10 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity each year, the equivalent of reducing 7.5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions.
LYU ZHIYAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Machinery increases farm yields in Heilongjiang

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin
zhouhuiying@chinadaily.com.cn

Although early spring temperatures remain low in Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, farmers have been busy preparing for the spring plowing season.

At the No 290 Company of Beidahuang Agricultural Reclamation Group, a State-owned enterprise, 850 advanced agricultural machines, including 32 large machines and 30 unmanned rice planters equipped with the Beidou Navigation Satellite System, have been transported and stored in preparation for the coming farm work this year.

When Qiu Yujin, 35, saw a huge Claas combine harvester in front of him, he began looking forward to another bumper harvest.

"The machine costs around 5 million yuan ($721,000)," he said. "And the operator only needs to input a few parameters so it can plan its own route and operate along the shortest path.

"The machine can help us save much more harvesting time to seize the best sale opportunities," he said. "After finishing its work on our farm, it can also help more farmers in surrounding areas."

Qiu has worked his portion of the land for the company since 2012.

"Last year, the profit from my 80 hectares of corn and soybeans was 700,000 yuan," he said. "With the help of these modern agricultural machines — especially the newly introduced ones — I believe I will see high-quality crops and high yields this autumn."

In recent years, the company, which has 51,333 hectares of arable land for growing rice, corn and soybeans, increased its investment in modern agricultural machinery and equipment, upgrading from traditional methods.

The company has purchased machinery from renowned companies, including Case, Claas and John Deere.

During the Spring Festival period, the company held a series of agricultural training courses to comprehensively improve farmers' techniques and guide them toward new ideas on intelligent agriculture.

An agricultural machine at the No 290 Company of Beidahuang Agricultural Reclamation Group. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Beidahuang is the name used to designate the fertile region, including the Sanjiang Plain along the Heilong and Nenjiang rivers, in the north of Heilongjiang.

In recent years, the Beidahuang Agricultural Reclamation Group has been working hard on research and development into its intelligent agricultural services.

The group has set up six unmanned intelligent farm demonstration zones, and has 418 sets of unmanned agricultural machinery, including 176 modified and optimized last year.

The operating area of unmanned agricultural machinery is 22,693 hectares, according to local officials.

With the help of big data collection and collation, a digital agricultural service platform has been created, providing information that can be used to manage the process of intelligent planting and enhance the brand value.

Beidahuang has achieved a 99 percent mechanization rate on arable land and is making increasing use of advanced technology.

By 2025, the group is expected to take the lead in realizing agricultural modernization in the country, with the goal of achieving a comprehensive grain production capacity of 25 million metric tons.

In 2022, Heilongjiang saw a grain harvest of 77.6 million tons, accounting for 11.3 percent of the national total, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

With a pristine ecology and one of the world's largest black soil zones, Heilongjiang leads the country in the amount of land devoted to planting rice, corn and soybeans, and has the nation's highest annual yield.

Farmers earn extra cash from bloom in tourism

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang
zhangyu1@chinadaily.com.cn

The coming of spring has caused the rapeseed fields to bloom in Xihan village of Guangping county, Hebei province, and tourists have started visiting to take photos among the golden flowers.

"It's a good day for outdoor activities. The sea of flowers is so beautiful. We enjoyed ourselves with a great day of sightseeing," said Ma Jing, who visited the village recently with her family.

They drove to the fields on Sunday from downtown Handan, which is about 50 kilometers from the village.

"Walking into the yellow field is like walking into a stunning picture," she said.

The village has become a tourist hot spot, much to its own surprise. The rapeseed was first planted in 2021 as a crop so that its seeds could be sold to make cooking oil, according to Wang Yao, deputy head of the Guangping township government, which administers the village.

"It's a rotation crop to fill in the gap after the harvest of sorghum, the main crop here," he said.

Gao Huaizhong, who grows rapeseed in the village, said the crop usually has a high yield.

"It's easier to grow and manage due to its drought resistance," he said.

> "Planting rapeseed has turned out to be a good way to develop agriculture and boost rural tourism at the same time."
>
> **Wang Yao,** deputy head of the Guangping township government

Gao plants rapeseed in October and harvests the seeds in May. The rest of the year, he plants sorghum.

"Last year, my income increased by 100,000 yuan ($14,500) thanks to the rapeseed," he said happily, gazing at the fields in front of him.

Gao, who has planted rapeseed on 4 hectares, said that besides using the seeds to make oil, the plant's roots and leaves can be turned into fertilizer.

Around 3,000 households in Guangping grow rapeseed and sorghum on 1,333 hectares of farmland each year, increasing incomes for farmers in about 10 villages.

"Planting rapeseed has turned out to be a good way to develop agriculture and boost rural tourism at the same time," said Wang Yao, the local government official.

CHINA

Platform to boost judicial protection

Understanding intl finance laws key for investors aiming abroad

By CAO YIN
caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

An online platform to help investors understand overseas financial laws and external market rules is to be established in order for Beijing to strengthen judicial protection in international finance.

"If the platform is established, domestic individuals and enterprises planning to go abroad will be given easier access to international conventions and the overseas investment climate," Xue Feng, a vice-president of the Beijing Financial Court, said on Thursday.

Regarding the platform as key to implementing the central leadership's requirement on promoting the rule of law at home and abroad, he said, "It will be an effective way for investors to prevent financial risks and improve the judicial efficiency of handling cases involving overseas affairs."

The platform, to be jointly built by the court and financial administrations, including those in banking and insurance, will help the country create a market-oriented, law-based and international business environment, he added.

The court has stepped up efforts to educate judges by increasing exchanges with law schools and academies nationwide to improve professionalism in tackling financial cases in matters involving overseas parties.

The court that specializes in hearing finance-related lawsuits was opened in Beijing on March 18, 2021, and aims to help China strengthen financial supervision, carry out financial reforms, prevent financial risks, improve the handling of monetary disputes and boost the Chinese judiciary's international influence.

Data provided by the court on Thursday showed that it had filed 15,464 cases as of March 18, and the amount of money involved in the lawsuits has been nearly 650 billion yuan ($95 billion).

To serve the country's building of the financial management center, Li Yanhong, another vice-president of the court, said that they have launched more than 50 cooperation projects with 36 departments, such as those on financial supervision, infrastructure and academies, as a joint force to deal with complicated financial problems by rule of law.

The court has also provided convenient legal services to litigants by opening a "noon courtroom" and an "evening courtroom", "so as to help employees with difficulties attending trials during working hours to solve financial problems in their spare time", she said.

The court has also set up a think tank of 32 financial experts to join hands with judges to face new challenges in the financial industry and ensure cases can be heard in a more professional manner, she added.

The intermediate-level court mainly covers finance-related civil and administrative disputes in the capital involving securities, insurance, bank cards and financial loan contracts. Appeals against its rulings need to be made to the Beijing High People's Court. It is the second financial court to be built in China. The first opened in Shanghai in 2018.

Consumers warned of bogus product reviews

By JIANG CHENGLONG
jiangchenglong@chinadaily.com.cn

China's consumer association has warned people about being misled by vloggers on social media who review consumer products, saying that some of them offer misleading information or may have conflicts of interest or may be deliberately influencing buyers for their own commercial gain.

A recent survey conducted by the China Consumers' Association investigated 350 social media accounts that provide third-party evaluation for products and commodities, including electronics, makeup and skin care products, baby and maternal products, and food and beverages.

The accounts post evaluation videos on an array of popular video-sharing platforms in China, such as Douyin, Kuaishou and Bilibili, in which they often do comparisons between similar competing products.

According to the survey released on Tuesday, 93.1 percent of those third-party videos were suspected of having flawed or over-subjective standards for evaluation. Some 56 percent of them had problems in their fairness for allegedly having commercial interests with product sellers, with 36 percent suspected of disinformation.

The association outlined 10 typical cases in which the so-called third-party evaluations had problems.

In a post on video-sharing app Kuaishou last March, a vlogger claimed a facial cleanser "fitted all skin types" when assessing the product for viewers. However, the association said many consumers complained in comment areas that the facial cleanser wasn't suitable for sensitive or dry skin.

Another account released three videos last summer on Douyin, in which it apparently evaluated three products — a skin-care set, milk powder and a household water purifier. But the account's evaluation results were only based on its own subjective comments, instead of setting standards and making parallel comparisons, according to the association.

Furthermore, the account put related shopping links in the videos, by which netizens could directly transfer to the main pages of those products — a behavior the association suspected of being commercial advertisement.

The investigation also surveyed around 6,000 consumers nationwide to learn how third-party evaluation videos have affected their daily shopping.

The investigation suggested that plenty of consumers, especially those middle-aged and young, were aware of third-party evaluation videos, and almost 80 percent of surveyed consumers would watch such videos before making purchases, particularly when buying electronics or makeup.

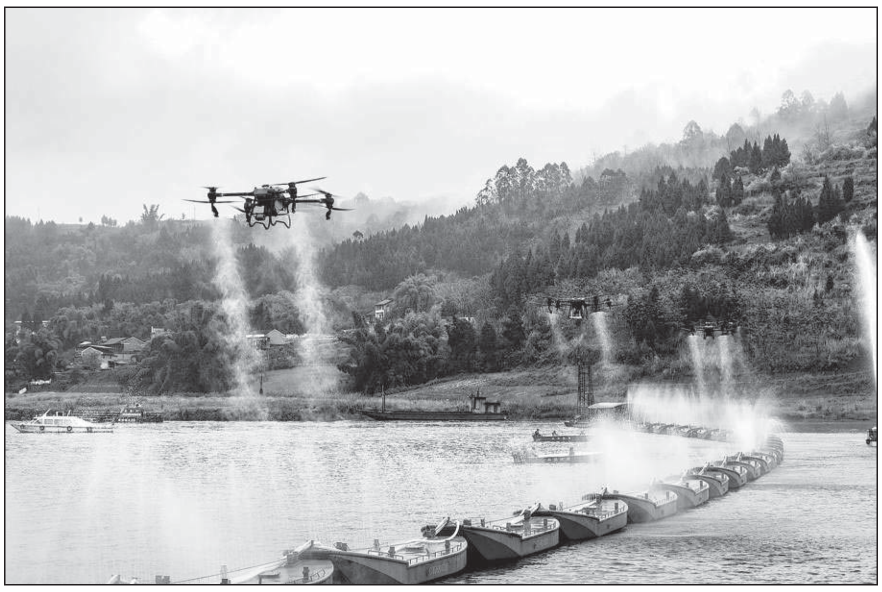
Compared with video posts on online shopping sites, those published on platforms with a stronger social following had more problems in terms of evaluation, the association said in a news release.

"At present, there are many social accounts on third-party evaluation, which have various evaluation methods and standards, and uneven evaluation quality," it said, pointing to some video accounts suspected of being run by product sellers themselves.

"Some third-party evaluations are not only unable to help consumers make correct shopping judgments, but also affect the normal market order," the association said. "Unfair and biased evaluations have seriously disrupted production and consumption."

It advised the government to strengthen market supervision by specifically determining the qualification of accounts on third-party evaluation.

Safety drill



Drones spray simulated heavy-metal absorbent during an exercise on dealing with water pollution incidents in Chongqing on Thursday. The drill, taking place on the Fujiang River, enlisted various devices from multiple monitoring personnel to test their capabilities in damage mitigation. HUANG WEI / XINHUA

Survey: 98 percent of Chinese satisfied with nation's democracy

By JIANG CHENGLONG
jiangchenglong@chinadaily.com.cn

Democracy, which the people of a country are in the best position to judge, should be focused on how it can deliver to the people, senior politicians and experts said on Thursday, as called for greater respect for how each country chooses to develop.

They made the remarks at the second International Forum on Democracy: Shared Human Values, which was held by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council Information Office in Beijing, and attended by various former and senior officials and veteran scholars worldwide.

Li Shulei, head of the publicity department, said in a keynote speech that democracy is the common value of all mankind, and the unswerving pursuit of China on its way to modernization.

"The whole-process people's democracy of China is the essential requirement of Chinese modernization, which targets not just a single field, but all aspects including politics, economy, culture, society and ecology," he said, noting that the country's democracy has been developing based on the national conditions, after the attempts to apply various Western modes of democracy in China since 1840 failed.

Mushahid Hussain Sayed, chairman of the Pakistan Senate Defence Committee, said people must have a say in their own democratic systems, stressing that it was China's democratic system that helped 800 million people rise out of poverty over the past four decades.

Abhisit Vejjajiva, former prime minister of Thailand, said many Western countries are struggling with a host of challenges, such as money politics and corruption, which have eroded their people's faith in government and democracy, even in those countries that are proud of having a long history of democracy.

He said some developing countries' governments are not truly representative of the people even though they have constitutions and democratic elections.

How democracy delivers for the people is one of the major focuses of people around the world, according to a global survey released by the Beijing-based Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies.

The survey, which last year collected over 9,600 samples from 23 countries worldwide including India, the United Kingdom, the United States and Kenya, suggested that the efficiency and effectiveness of the Chinese government were affirmed by 88.8 percent of respondents on average.

Meanwhile, 98 percent of surveyed Chinese people trusted their government and were satisfied with the democratic situation in the country, it showed.

In addition to the role that democracy plays domestically, the forum participants urged greater democracy in international relations.

"If we want to have democracy, we cannot have hegemonism," said Fred Mmembe, president of the Socialist Party of Zambia, underlining that a country isn't qualified as a democratic country if it has no respect for the sovereignty and policies of other countries.

Former Japanese prime minister Yukio Hatoyama, expressed his worry about an emerging trend of Western countries, including the US, the UK and Japan, which are continually creating conflicts of values in the world.

If values of democracy and human rights are excessively utilized in the diplomatic field, it must inevitably lead to discrimination and exclusion of countries with different values, he said, criticizing the US-led Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and "Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity" as having been regarded as targeting China in the name of values.

In fact, the traditional governance thought of Chinese democracy and Chinese modernization has been mostly recognized by people around the world, according to the global survey, saying that 93.6 percent of respondents agreed with the traditional Chinese concept that harmony is the most valuable.

"The world's future should be in the hands of the people of all countries, international rules should be formulated by all countries, ... and the fruits of development should be shared by all countries," said Li, the publicity department head.

Soaring success

Visitors tour a display of models of the C919 and CR929 passenger jets at the booth of the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China during an exhibition showcasing innovation in the civil aviation sector in Beijing on Thursday. The three-day event shines a light on achievements in smart travel, operation, management and logistics. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

Logos for three major space missions in 2023 revealed

The China Manned Space Agency has revealed logos for three missions of China's manned space program this year — the launches of the cargo craft Tianzhou 6, and the crewed spaceships Shenzhou XVI and Shenzhou XVII.

According to the CMSA, since the call out for logo designs on Feb 15, it has received more than 1,500 submissions from over 500 organizations and individuals across China.

After preliminary selection, online voting and final validation, three logos, which were designed by Xiaoao Tiangong Culture and Art (Beijing) Center, the Beijing Institute of Space Science and Technology Information, and a postgraduate student at Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, were officially released.

The selected logos were well designed and filled with the best wishes for China's space station. The logo of the Shenzhou XVI mission even incorporates the *kun*, a sacred animal from Chinese mythology, which flies extremely high, far and steadily.

It was the first open logo solicitation of China's manned space program, said the CMSA.

The Tianzhou 6 cargo craft is expected to launch in May. The Shenzhou XVI and Shenzhou XVII spaceships will launch in May and October, respectively, and will dock with the space station to form a combination of three modules and three spaceships, according to an earlier announcement made by the CMSA.

XINHUA

Policies help increase Tibet's trade overseas

By PALDEN NYIMA in Lhasa
palden_nyima@chinadaily.com.cn

The Tibet autonomous region stepped up its policy support for foreign trade with its total exports and imports growing steadily last year.

The region's foreign trade grew by 14.6 percent year-on-year to 4.6 billion yuan ($680 million) in 2022, customs data showed. The growth rate was 6.9 percentage points higher than the country's average growth rate for the year.

According to Lhasa Customs, Tibet's exports reached 4.3 billion yuan, while imports stood at 292 million yuan last year. In the first two months of the year, foreign trade hit 480 million yuan.

"Over the past year, the region has been actively implementing the related policies and measures for foreign trade released by the central and regional governments," Dedron, an official in the foreign trade office of the regional commerce department, was quoted by Tibet Daily as saying.

"More than 140 enterprises involved in foreign trade in the region were surveyed to learn their difficulties and challenges, and special funds were allocated to ensure the stable operation of foreign trade in the region."

Tibet has been working on the construction of a border logistics platform and channel in recent years, she added. The establishment of the Gyirong Border Economic Cooperation Zone and the Lhasa Comprehensive Cross-border E-commerce Pilot Zone was approved this year.

The Ministry of Commerce has allocated 20 million yuan in special funds to support the construction of the Gyirong Border Economic Cooperation Zone.

The Lhasa Comprehensive Cross-border E-commerce Pilot Zone finalized its first transaction — 40 metric tons of wool and 20 tons of cashmere — to Nepal earlier this year.

Over the past year, the export freight volume of the region's ports of Zhangmu and Gyirong with Nepal hit 97,000 metric tons, an increase of 5 percent year-on-year. The export trade volume with Nepal reached 2.8 billion yuan, almost the same as in 2021.

"Tibet has been actively building a new land-sea trade channel over the past few years, and the region has been connecting with provinces and municipalities including Shaanxi, Qinghai, Guangdong and Chongqing to promote the building of an open channel with South Asian countries," said Dedron.

"The region has held talks with Nepal's Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supply in the areas of port construction, clearance, investment, trade facilitation, and broadening economic and trade cooperation," she said.

"Next, we hope to lead more foreign enterprises in the region to explore international markets, and to promote the exports of more plateau products, including bottled water, barley products, yak meat and fungus," she added.

Sonam, a resident of Lhasa who has been engaged with foreign trade for almost three years, said rice from Pakistan and milk powder from Sri Lanka are popular with locals in Lhasa.

"I have been working with partners to sell rice, milk powder and tea leaves in Tibet, and hope to build my own foreign trade company in Lhasa soon," Sonam said. "In 2021, I made an income of around 500,000 yuan from the trade business."

Qixian raises toast to future of glassmaking

China Shanxi

County of Shanxi predicts trade revival after characteristic industries highlighted throughout province

By YUAN SHENGGAO

From left: A worker paints a glass vase at a plant of Honghai Glassware, which is famous for its handmade glassware. An automatic glass production line of Dahua Glassware. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

With a history of producing glassware for several centuries, the central Shanxi county of Qixian is expecting to see an industry revival in the coming years.

This is because Qixian was included among the first batch of 10 provincial-level characteristic towns for specialty industries in Shanxi, according to Li Jun, Party secretary of Qixian.

The Shanxi provincial government released the list in September 2022. Developing towns with characteristic industries is a new strategy for Shanxi, which aims to create advantageous industries for local growth.

Li said that Qixian's history in glassmaking was related to the renowned Shanxi merchants who were said to have dominated foreign trade in North China during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

Qixian had been one of the hubs of the Shanxi merchants' business activities. They began selling tea, silk and porcelain products to Europe and ended up bringing back European lifestyle products and production techniques.

Back in China, they started drinking wine with glasses imported from Europe and later tried to set up local mills to produce glassware.

According to Li, modernized glassware manufacturers emerged in the early 20th century. But the industry was dominated by small mills for a long time.

He said the industry began to expand drastically at the end of the 20th century, with rapid increases in the number and scale of manufacturers, as well as the modernization of operations.

At present, the county is home to 50 glassware manufacturers who are capable of producing more 8,000 product varieties. The companies reported a combined output value of 2.3 billion yuan ($336.5 million) in 2022.

In 2006, the combined output value of Qixian's glassware manufacturers reached 1 billion yuan for the first time, in comparison with the annual value of about 150 million yuan in the late 1990s.

According to Li, the industrial chain now includes another 200-plus enterprises in raw materials supply, equipment and component production, packaging, logistics and trade. The entire chain offers more than 20,000 jobs to local residents.

With its products sold to more than 80 countries and regions, Qixian is also a major glassware exporter in China. Li said the county now produces about one-fifth of China's total glassware exports.

He said the secret behind the industry's rapid development are local producers' focus on both modern and traditional techniques and their relentless efforts in branding and expanding sales channels.

Li's opinion is shared by a number of local entrepreneurs. Li Jiansheng, chairman of local producer Honghai Glassware, said that while using the latest technologies and equipment, the company emphasizes the traditional techniques of manual glassblowing and the craftsmanship of its experienced workers.

In the company's premises, modern manufacturing facilities stand alongside mills that require traditional, manual techniques.

"We have machine-made glassware to meet the demand of mass markets," the executive said. "And the handmade products are set to supply upmarket buyers."

He added that the completion of handmade glassware needs up to 30 technical procedures and requires great craftsmanship by skilled workers.

This is also the case with Dongyu Glassware, another local manufacturer. He Yaowang, Dongyu's chairman, said the company's manually blown glassware is a source of pride.

"Our top four brands are all handmade products," He said. "And Baer, the best of the four, is now among China's top 10 utensil brands favored by hoteliers."

Local statistics show that about 50 percent of the manually blown glassware products on today's Chinese mainland market are from Qixian. And manually blown goblets from the county account for 65 percent of domestic market share.

Dahua Glassware, on the other hand, has achieved rapid growth through modernization over the past two decades.

In 1999, the company became one of the earliest producers in North China to install advanced electric furnaces for glass fusion. It then began to use automatic production lines in 2006. In 2020, Dahua became the first maker of daily glassware in China to launch an intelligent manufacturing plant.

The local manufacturers have strengthened branding efforts to increase the recognition and popularity of their products.

Qixian's glassware producers now boast a total of 229 registered trademarks. Of them, two brands — Dahua and Hongyi — are recognized as China's famous trademarks by the Trademark Office of the National Intellectual Property Administration.

Qixian's Party secretary Li Jun said that the listing of Qixian as a provincial-level characteristic town will give a boost to the glassware industry.

"The listing can help to increase the industry's branding influence and attract more businesses to invest in this sector," he said.

To prepare for an investment boom, the county is planning to build a glassware industrial park and a facility for the trade in glassware products.

The Party secretary said Qixian has set aside a special fund of 50 million yuan to help businesses start up and grow their operations.

The official said he is optimistic about the industry's future. He predicted that the number of glassware manufacturers in Qixian could surpass 80 in 2025 and the number of other enterprises in the industrial chain could exceed 300.

He also estimated that the local industry's share in domestic and international high-end markets could increase by about 10 percent in three years and the annual output value of the entire industrial chain could surpass 5 billion yuan in 2025.

Bai Xuhong and Zhang Qian contributed to this story.

Datong piloting road electrification efforts

By YUAN SHENGGAO

With the world's first electrified railway built in Berlin, Germany, in 1879, traffic electrification has become a revolutionary achievement in changing the transportation industry.

Rail transportation is the major beneficiary of this revolution, with electrified railways now accounting for a majority of railroads worldwide. However, road electrification is still lacking as it's mostly limited to trolley buses and trams used for today's inner-city passenger transportation.

The city of Datong in Shanxi province is showing promise for the future of road electrification. A latest trial offers hope of ushering in a new era.

On March 14, a special road began trial operation in the city. Its launch ceremony was marked by a heavy-duty truck running on the road, with a pantograph linked to the electric cables above the road.

Developed by the CRRC Datong, a branch company of China National Railway Locomotive & Rolling Stock Industry Corporation, and other research entities in the country, the trial run was China's first demonstrative project for road electrification.

According to executives at CRRC Datong, the electrified road is designed to reduce emissions from cargo-transporting vehicles.

Liu Ruihong, an executive at CRRC Datong, said the project is "a bold attempt to revolutionize the traditional road transportation," guided by China's carbon-neutrality initiative.

"Our plan to develop the electrified road system is also based on research on the current market dynamics and on existing technologies," he said.

He added that the International Energy Agency has proposed road electrification as a major direction of development for future road transport systems. "It predicts that about 36 percent of heavy trucks will be driven by electricity via cable-connected pantographs."

The company estimated that the market value of road electrification in China can reach 520 billion yuan ($75.5 billion) within 30 years.

Liu Peng, vice-president of the research academy of CRRC Datong, said the successful launch of the road electrification project is based on the company's technological strength, building on its decades of experience in developing railway systems.

Over the past seven decades, the company has produced a total of 12,000 train locomotives, earning it a strong position in China's railway equipment manufacturing industry.

The CRRC Datong road electrification project features vehicles powered by overhead cables. LUO YITONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

"We have developed a series of groundbreaking technologies for this project," Liu Peng said.

One such technology is the smart pantograph system tailored to road electrification.

"The pantograph has the same quality as high-speed train pantographs," he said. "And there are also new functions for the road."

The distinctive function of the pantograph is that it can offer electricity to both drive and charge the vehicles. "Charging takes place in the process of driving, which allows the vehicle to run a long distance off the road, without connecting to the cables," Liu Peng explained.

The executive added that the energy utilization efficiency of vehicles using road electrification solutions can reach about 80 percent, twice that of conventional diesel-fueled vehicles.

He noted that the system will first be used for regular routes like roads linking coal mines but will be eventually extended to other roads.

Leng Xue contributed to this story.

Services riding wave of 'revenge spending'

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Although two months have passed since the Spring Festival holiday, a festive atmosphere is still being felt at the Shanxi Guild House, a restaurant in the provincial capital of Taiyuan.

It is known for its *daoxiaomian* — or knife-cutting noodle — and other noodle varieties with Shanxi's characteristics. The outlet was filled with diners on a mid-March day, who were treated to knife-cutting noodles and performances that included folk songs and local opera.

However, Xiao Zhang, a master cook at the restaurant, was the most popular performer. Balancing a huge bowl of flour on his head and hauling a single-wheel cart equipped with a stove and pot, his presence aroused cheers and applause among diners.

With all the equipment in place, he began to cut strips of noodles with his hands. After one minute, a serving of noodles was ready.

"We are glad to welcome back diners after a three-year pandemic," said a manager of the restaurant. "We try to offer the best food and entertainment to our customers."

He said many catering outlets in Taiyuan have been filled with "revenge-spending" customers for the past two months after the government optimized pandemic control measures. "Seat occupancy nowadays has exceeded the level of the same period in 2019," he added.

"Revenge spending" is now the catchword of Shanxi's service industry that includes tourism, hospitality and retail, and shows the fast recovery of consumer confidence.

Industry insiders said the recovery began before the pandemic response level adjustment. They believe the measures that governments at all levels in Shanxi began to implement in 2022 bucked an economic slowdown and laid a foundation for this year's rapid growth.

Those feelings correspond to figures released by the Shanxi Department of Commerce.

In the automobile sales industry, for instance, the department said it granted a subsidy worth 649 million yuan ($94.23 million) for the sale of vehicles in 2022, which resulted in total sales revenue of 16.06 billion yuan.

For the retail industry, the government issued digital consumption coupons worth 2.51 billion yuan, which led to total sales revenue of 26.84 billion yuan in 2022.

Other measures taken by the government to stimulate the consumer market in the past year included fostering the nighttime economy, promoting e-commerce and cultivating and strengthening renowned local brands.

Wang Hongjin, head of the department, said that the government's stimulative measures will continue this year and more initiatives will be taken to boost the consumer market.

The department and the Shanxi Association of Retailers hosted the first Shanxi Summit on High-Quality Retail Industry Development in Taiyuan on March 8-9, inviting entrepreneurs and experts to give their proposals for the development of the retail sector as well as the entire service industry.

At the summit, participants said there should be new efforts to upgrade the service industry toward the direction of high-quality and efficient development.

The efforts should include strengthened brand building, the application of digital technologies and innovating operational models.

Yan Jie contributed to this story.

A local entrepreneur shares his insights into industrial growth at the Shanxi Summit on High-Quality Retail Industry Development. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Fair attracts investors to special steel industry

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shanxi's special steel industry is earning attention from investors and is expected to form an extended industrial chain, according to results of a recent trade fair.

The fair for the industry's investment promotion was held on March 19 in Taiyuan. Taiyuan Iron and Steel Group, a leading steelmaker in Shanxi, hosted the event.

Special steel refers to varieties with distinctive physical and chemical properties and special applications, which are different from common steel products.

According to Yan Lin, deputy chief of the Shanxi Department of Industry and Information Technology, Shanxi has formed a complete chain for the special steel industry, with 27 enterprises engaged in the supply of raw materials, steelmaking and equipment manufacturing using special steel products.

Data from the department show that the industry in Shanxi reported an output value of 80 billion yuan ($11.62 billion) in 2022. Officials predicted that the figure could reach 120 billion yuan in 2025.

Stainless steel foils produced at Taiyuan Iron and Steel Group. WANG XUHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Taiyuan Iron and Steel, the leader of the industrial chain, left a deep impression on visitors by displaying its cutting-edge products at the show.

On exhibition were the company's products like super-thin broadsheet stainless steel foil, and products with special applications in nuclear power, railway and automobile industries.

The most eye-catching was the super-thin broadsheet stainless steel foil, which is also called hand-torn steel by the general public, because, with a thickness of less than 0.02 millimeters, the product can be easily torn apart by hand.

With such a thickness, the product is used to take the place of aluminum foil in similar industrial applications, like the fields of aerospace, electronics, petrochemicals and automobiles, according to Liao Xi, a researcher at the company.

He said Taiyuan Iron and Steel is among the very few companies in the world capable of producing soft steel foil of 0.02 mm or thinner.

The company is sharing its resources with upstream and downstream enterprises, especially in the field of research and development.

Yan of SDIIT said Taiyuan Iron and Steel has played an important role in expanding the special steel chain and that its growth can help to attract more enterprises to join the industry.

One example is that Xinyuanhong, a company based in Shenzhen, has agreed to expand its electrical motor production facility in Taiyuan. This is a downstream enterprise that uses high-strength steel made by manufacturers like Taiyuan Iron and Steel to produce wearable motor components.

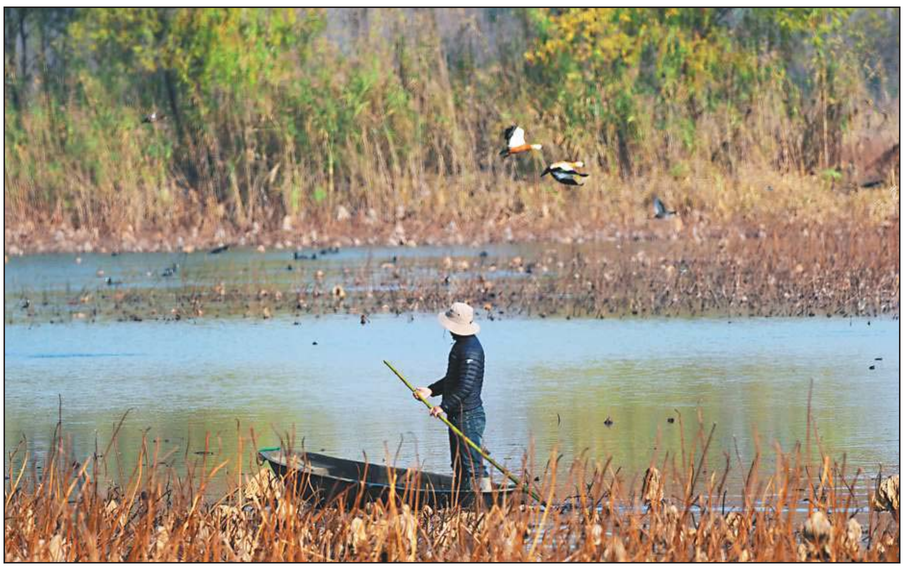
In a development zone in the city of Jiexiu, a special steel industrial park is now under construction. Local officials predicted this park could develop into a huge establishment with output worth 100 billion yuan and more investment to come.

Zhang Yi contributed to this story.

CHINA

Devotion to ducks earns man a protector's badge

Crayfish farmer in Wuhan takes action after finding critically endangered species, Baer's pochards, nesting in his pond



Clockwise from top: Zhu Xiangneng, a crayfish pond owner in Wuhan, Hubei province, goes on patrol to protect Baer's pochards. A Baer's pochard, an endangered species of diving duck, swims in Baoxie Lake in Wuhan on June 7. Baer's pochards fly above Baoxie Lake on June 7. PHOTOS BY YAN JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

By **CHEN MEILING** in Beijing and **LIU KUN** in Wuhan

Holding a green bamboo pole, Zhu Xiangneng carefully punted a tiny skiff across a pond filled with lush water plants, like in a scene from a martial arts film.

Much like characters in films who discover a secret martial arts manual and then become superheroes — a common trope — the 39-year-old discovered by chance that Baer's pochards, a critically endangered species of diving ducks, were living in his crayfish pond, turning him into a hero dedicated to their protection.

In 2010, Zhu rented a 13.3-hectare pond near Baoxie Lake in his hometown of Wuhan, Hubei province, after quitting his job elsewhere. He raised fish until a flood destroyed his business, and then decided to start raising crayfish instead in 2016, as they were in demand on the local market.

Over time, he started noticing ducks hanging around the pond that he'd never seen before. One day, he struck up a conversation with members of the Wuhan Bird Watching Association, who happened to be observing birds in the area, and asked them what species the ducks were.

He found out that they were Baer's pochards, a species under first-class State protection. Less than 2,000 of the birds are estimated to exist.

Zhu's pond is an important breeding area for the species in Wuhan. It's possible they are attracted by the depth and quality of the pond's water, its plants and plankton, as well as the lotus leaves under which they can hide, the bird watchers told him. To date, 10 nests have been found.

The association asked Zhu whether he would agree to let them install surveillance cameras and infrared cameras to record the birds.

"I was worried he would say no, because the ducks could compete for food with the crayfish and affect his earnings," said Yan Jun, president of the association.

But Zhu immediately agreed, saying that the birds "only eat a small amount of food and the loss is acceptable".

As a child, he used to shoot birds with a slingshot, but now, as a member of the bird-watching association, he observes and takes photos of Baer's pochards every day, and has developed a deep affection for them.

He logs the camera results in a notebook: "On May 21, a mother duck played with 10 ducklings and rested on lotus leaves"; "On June 2, a mouse attempted to steal eggs from a nest but failed"; "On June 4, a yellow weasel ate the only two eggs left in a nest".

"It's a shame that the eggs were eaten, but this is natural law and we shouldn't intervene," Zhu said, adding that he was also impressed by the sight of ducklings hatching.

During last year's breeding season between April and August, the birds built 10 nests and laid 99 eggs. In the end, 73 ducklings were born, and Zhu now checks the area in the morning and at night to make sure no one hunts or disturbs the ducks.

He added that they have begun to lose their fear of people after staying there for so long, although they still fly off if he gets within 100 or 200 meters of them.

Zhu now devotes most of his time to the birds, sometimes carrying out observations with the association.

"It's much more interesting than playing mahjong," he said.

The association gave him a telescope and camera, and taught him how to recognize birds and take photos of them.

"Some of my photos have been given a thumbs-up by friends and netizens, which gives me a sense of achievement," Zhu said, adding that he can now recognize 50 kinds of birds.

"They have been to Siberia and India, and now they're here with me. I feel like my connection with the world has grown closer," he said.

According to Yan Jun, Baer's pochards have been seen in 12 Wuhan wetlands, and their breeding grounds have expanded in recent years. About 110 volunteers from the association work toward their protection, he said, adding that the extremely endangered species plays an essential role in global biodiversity.

He added that he is pleased that Zhu is willing to participate, as some pond owners don't cooperate because the ducks can affect their businesses.

"He is willing to accept new ideas and likes to watch nature documentaries. This is because of the national promotion of environmental protection," Yan said. "It's only through the participation of more people like Zhu that the environment will improve."

Zhu said he doesn't want the Baer's pochard to disappear.

"I hope future generations will be able to see it, too."

Contact the writers at chenmeiling@chinadaily.com.cn

Making art from ice takes innovation

By **ZHOU HUIYING** in Harbin
zhouhuiying@chinadaily.com.cn

Wang Haifeng (front) and her team participate in an ice sculpture competition in the United States in 2019. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

As the temperature rises with the coming of spring, the ice in Heilongjiang province is beginning to melt.

But Wang Haifeng is already looking forward to another winter when people will be able to see one of the country's most spectacular sights, the province's ice and snow sculptures.

"In most parts of China, it's not cold enough to make snow or ice sculptures outdoors," said the 35-year-old head of the model worker innovation studio founded in her name at the Heilongjiang Provincial Forestry Design and Research Institute. "But in Heilongjiang, frozen rivers are a source of large, good quality ice blocks, and the cold weather brings plentiful snow."

The province is iced over for more than a third of the year, which may not suit everyone who lives there, but is perfect for Wang, who considers making ice and snow sculptures an important part of her life.

"As a Harbin native, I have been fascinated by the ice and snow sculptures along the roadsides and in the parks since I was a child," she said. "After being admitted to the department of art design at the Harbin Institute of Technology in 2008, I got the chance to make some of these unique artworks."

In 2010, Wang began to participate in ice sculpting competitions at home and abroad, winning honors at competitions in China, Russia, the United States and Canada.

After earning her master's in design art from Harbin Normal University in 2017, she became the director of the newly founded office of ice and snow tourism planning and design at the Heilongjiang Provincial Forestry Design and Research Institute.

The office, initially made up of six members, engaged in different professions such as architecture, design and electrical engineering. It was founded to pursue cultural innovation and scientific research, launch competitions and engage in landscape planning and design related to ice and snow.

"Taking full advantage of our team and following an environmentally friendly approach as our basis, we are endeavoring to create a unique culture of ice and snow and promote the development of ice and snow science innovation, to achieve the sustainable development of the ice and snow economy," she said. "The experience we gain from competing also helps us create better projects."

In December 2020, Wang was awarded the title of "Craftsman of Heilongjiang", and the office was officially renamed the Wang Haifeng Model Worker Innovation Studio.

In April last year, she was chosen to be a delegate to the 13th Heilongjiang Provincial Party Congress.

"As a representative of the ice and snow sector, I hope to speak up and convey our message to the public," she said. "It is a good opportunity, as well as my responsibility."

In recent years, Wang and her team have made numerous outdoor sculptures in the province, as well as indoor sculptures in Beijing and Tianjin.

Very few women do the job, which requires a reasonable amount of physical strength.

"Working outdoors in the northeastern winter is really a challenge," she said. "We often work for 10 hours a day, but I enjoy every minute."

Sculptors have to be careful to protect themselves, especially as they navigate ice blocks several meters high carrying carving tools.

While making the sculptures, Wang combines high technology with art.

In 2019, she and her team conducted calculations of the snow volume in Yichun city by using unmanned aerial vehicle surveillance technology for the first time in China.

In 2021, she suggested making handles for sculptures using a new kind of straw composite material developed by Huizhou University, and after repeated experiments, they finally succeeded.

Tools they created have obtained patents at the national level and are being mass-produced, making outstanding contributions to the improvement of snow and ice tools available in the province.

"As the leader in the ice and snow sector, Heilongjiang has a long history and deep culture of ice and snow," she said. "Now that we're faced with fierce competition, we should get together to improve innovation and promote the development of the ice and snow sector in our province."

Famed eatery reopens after enduring epidemic

Nestled within the maze of *hutong* in Beijing's Dongcheng district, a small, unassuming restaurant drew a steady stream of customers on an ordinary Monday morning in February.

Guo Hua, owner of the Yuebin restaurant, was visibly impressed to see snaking queues outside the doors of the eatery.

The first private restaurant to open after reform and opening-up began in the late 1970s, this venerable feature of Beijing's dining scene has captured the hearts and taste buds of those who seek out the delectable offerings that belie its humble appearance.

"We would normally see our first customers after 11:30 am. It's our first day of business after Spring Festival, and I didn't anticipate so many people so early in the morning," Guo said.

The restaurant is around 40 square meters in size and accommodates 11 dining tables, which makes it feel slightly cramped. The walls are adorned with photos of the elder generations of restaurant owners.

By lunchtime, the place was swarming with customers eagerly waiting to try specialty dishes passed down for decades. The restaurant's famous fried meatballs and sweet and sour pork ribs added to the lively atmosphere.

Since Yuebin first opened in 1980, guests from far and wide have come to taste traditional Beijing dishes. To preserve the memory of the olden days, the restaurant has retained its original facade and name.

For the past three years, like many other small businesses, Yuebin has been affected by the COVID-19 epidemic, closing and reopening several times.

Fortunately, Guo received support from the government and regular customers. "We were concerned to see stores and restaurants being affected. We tried our best to find ways to allow everyone to return to work and staunch losses as soon as we could," said Liu Xiaolong, an official with the community branch of the district's market supervision bureau.

Government support included tax reductions and exemptions. "At such a critical moment, the support helped us weather the challenges," Guo said. "The fact that customers have been thinking about our restaurant encourages us to keep going."

Guo renovated the restaurant during the Spring Festival this year. She said she received many phone calls during the holiday from regular customers and friends who were eagerly waiting to dine at their favorite restaurant again.

"On the first day of reopening, everything went smoothly, and the restaurant was once again bustling with activity," she said.

Guo also took a picture with all her employees in front of the restaurant on that day, which marked "the beginning of the new phase of Yuebin".

XINHUA

Neolithic settlement reveals details of China's past

Remains of pots unearthed in the ruins of the Neolithic settlement site in Anyang city, Henan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ZHENGZHOU — Chinese archaeologists have discovered the ruins of a Neolithic settlement site dating back more than 7,000 years in Anyang city, Henan province, that offers valuable insight into the prehistoric lifestyle.

The site is situated in Balizhuang village. It occupies a roughly elliptical area of about 27,000 square meters and is about 230 meters wide and 150 meters long, according to the Anyang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.

Based on carbon-14 dating results, the site dates back to between approximately 7,800 and 7,400 years ago — the middle Neolithic period — and has been linked to Peiligang culture. Peiligang is one of the earliest ruins in China, dating back about 8,000 years. It provides important evidence for the study of the development of agriculture, pottery making and textiles, as well as ancient alcohol-making techniques.

Archaeologists also unearthed an ancient river channel approximately 100 meters wide to the southwest side of the site.

"It is believed that the ancient residents of the site lived along this river," said Shen Wenxi, with the institute. "The entire site is well-preserved, with a wealth of cultural heritage."

Archaeologists also discovered prehistoric building materials scattered across the site and the bases of partially sunken buildings.

According to Kong Deming, the leader of the archaeological team, the discovery indicates that the residents of the site were already settled, offering insights into the sedentary lifestyle of people over 7,000 years ago.

Numerous stone tools were unearthed, including shovels, axes, sickles, grinding stones and pestles, which showed great sophistication in their making, according to Kong.

From felling trees and tilling the soil to harvesting crops and threshing, there were stone tools available for every step of the agricultural process, demonstrating that agriculture then had already entered a new period of using hoes.

Additionally, the discoveries of fragmentary animal skeletons found in the ancient river channel indicate that hunter-gathering and fishing were still important to residents.

"Preliminary observations show that there were mammals such as hogs, dogs and deer, as well as shellfish, conchs and fish. We even found bird bones," said Shen Wenxi, adding that the findings lay the foundation for understanding the production and economic activity at that time.

Peiligang culture is the most sophisticated of China's assorted mid-Neolithic archaeological cultures found to date, and their migration and expansion created a series of cultural interactions that drove the evolution and development of other Neolithic cultures, Kong told Xinhua.

"It is an important source of Chinese civilization," he said.

Ongoing excavation is being conducted at the Balizhuang site, with a further study focusing on its cultural connotations and settlement distribution.

XINHUA

COMMENT

Editorials

Washington's desperate bid for hi-tech hegemony to incur loss of the world

To further squeeze the space for the development of China's technology sector, the United States has proposed rules to prevent the country and other foreign nations of concern from taking advantage of a $52 billion federal government fund under the US Chips and Science Act aimed at boosting the manufacture of semiconductor chips in the US.

The US Commerce Department said on Tuesday that grant recipients will be prohibited from investing or expanding semiconductor business in countries such as China, and they are not allowed to engage in joint research or share technology related to semiconductors with these nations. The world's major memory-chip makers such as Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix, as well as Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp, which have production facilities on the Chinese mainland, are all expected to be subjected to the restrictions.

The latest US move is part of Washington's strategy to constrain the development of China's technology sector, all for the purpose of maintaining the US' high-tech hegemony.

Apart from cracking down on Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei and other high-tech companies globally, the US has in recent years basically banned all exports to China of advanced chips, the equipment to make them, and even foreign-made chips that used US technology during the production process in the name of safeguarding national security. Just months ago, the US persuaded Japan and the Netherlands to join its restrictions on the export of chip-manufacturing technology to Chinese companies.

The sweeping technological blockade that the US has imposed on China, which violates trade rules, has disrupted global industry and supply chains, given that China remains the world's largest semiconductor market that accounts for more than 30 percent of global chips sales. The ongoing efforts of Washington to shift processor chips production from Asia to the US is also expected to double the cost of chips, as TSMC founder Morris Chang estimated, which will undoubtedly harm the semiconductor industry's ecosystem. "When the cost goes up, the pervasiveness of chips will either stop or slow down considerably," he said.

Yet US efforts to strangle China's high-tech sector will only strengthen the country's resolve to hasten the building of its own semiconductor industry in pursuit of chip self-sufficiency. China is already able to mass-produce 14-nanometer chips, which can basically meet the country's demands from new energy vehicles, smart cities and the internet of things, and it is accelerating its efforts to make breakthroughs in more advanced manufacturing processes. It is expected that its chip self-sufficiency rate will reach 70 percent by 2025. History will prove the US' tech war to be both futile and a grave misjudgment.

Roar of bloodsucking US war machine

The United States' response to China's latest efforts to promote peace talks between Russia and Ukraine makes clear its determination to turn the ongoing hostilities at the heart of Europe into a protracted conflict.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken even went so far as to allege that China's efforts to promote peace this week were a diplomatic ploy to help Russia, saying that "the world should not be fooled by any tactical move by Russia supported by China, or any other country, to freeze the war on its own terms".

In the same vein, White House National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby also criticized China, claiming that China's position on the Ukraine issue should not be viewed as impartial.

All such obfuscating rhetoric only adds weight to Kirby's remark admitting that a peace deal would be "unacceptable" to the Joe Biden administration.

The intention of the Biden administration to delay and offset a peaceful resolution to the one-year-old conflict and continue to fuel the war flames in Ukraine is in total disregard of the plight of the Ukrainian people and the lives that are being lost on the battlefield.

China's 12-point proposal for ending the Ukraine crisis, made public on the first anniversary of the war last month, was widely welcomed by the world community, the United Nations and Kyiv included. The US administration's unwarranted finger-pointing at China is both duplicitous and contrary to the global aspiration for a peaceful end to the conflict.

China has all along abided by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter on the Ukraine crisis, and as a responsible country, it is seeking to promote a cease-fire. It is not sitting idle even though it could since it is neither the one that created the Ukraine crisis nor is it a party to the crisis. It adheres to an objective, principled and impartial stance, and is actively encouraging peace talks.

China's efforts to broker peace are in sharp contrast to the US, which has constantly fanned the flames of the conflict and exploited the situation for selfish gains. The remarks by Blinken and Kirby simply serve to highlight that China is now increasingly seen as a capable, trustworthy, impartial and effective peace broker.

Thanks to the devoted ministrations of the Biden administration, the Ukraine crisis is grinding on, causing untold sufferings for people in the country and dire consequences around the world as a result of its spillover effects. The Biden administration should accept that its ideologically driven campaign to suppress Russia is a relic of the Cold War and is abhorred by most of the international community. It does not uphold any of the values that it claims to be acting under the banner of. It is simply the latest meal plan to satisfy the voracious appetite of the US war machine.

It should abandon its selfish calculus and work with others to bring this conflict to an end before it spirals beyond control.

Japan's club membership brings risks to region

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's surprise visit to Ukraine on Tuesday, which was announced hours before his appearance on a train to Kyiv was recorded by media cameras, has grabbed more attention than his previous stop, a two-day visit to India.

He is the last of the G7 leaders to visit Ukraine, as well as the first Japanese prime minister to set foot in a military conflict zone since World War II.

Kishida seems intent on leading his country across the threshold into the arena of military conflicts by acting as a pawn of the United States.

Japan is not only an active participant in Washington's "Indo-Pacific" strategy and the Quad mechanism, both of which are aimed at containing China, but also, as the new "Indo-Pacific" initiative Kishida proposed in New Delhi indicates, a fecund hen ready to lay its own anti-China eggs.

Since its Constitution prohibits it from providing arms, the generous financial aid Japan has provided Ukraine with, second only to that of the US, not only shows Tokyo's enthusiasm to follow Washington's line but also signals to the other G7 members that it is no less committed to the cause than they are.

The intensive diplomatic agenda of the Japanese leader since early this month — he has met with the leaders of the Republic of Korea, Germany, India and Ukraine — could have had practical value if he had acted as a responsible broker of peace. He could have contributed to easing regional tensions in East Asia, maintaining the integrity of global supply chains, strengthening solidarity in the Asia-Pacific region and calming the situation in Europe.

Instead Kishida has done the opposite. His government is taking full advantage of Japan presiding over the G7 summit in May to act as a procurer touting for customers for the US' anti-China tavern, inviting the ROK and Indian leaders to the gathering of the rich club. That's an invitation Seoul and New Delhi, both big-time dreamers, cannot resist. It is disappointing that these countries share the same self-abasement psychology believing that only by aligning themselves with the West can they be regarded as first-class members of the international community.

Tokyo's willingness to serve as a springboard for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to enter the Asia-Pacific, or to take the lead in forming an "Asian NATO" on behalf of Washington can be attributed to that ingrained mindset as well.

It is clear that Japan cares more about the West's acceptance of it than regional countries' feelings and interests. Its neighbors were regarded as stepping stones for it to join the club of the West in the past, and they still are today. That being said, considering what Washington has instigated in Europe, the extent to which the Kishida government has shown its willingness to do Washington's bidding deserves caution by those giving an ear to its words and vigilance from the rest of the region.

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Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Huixin Dongjie Chaoyang District, Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

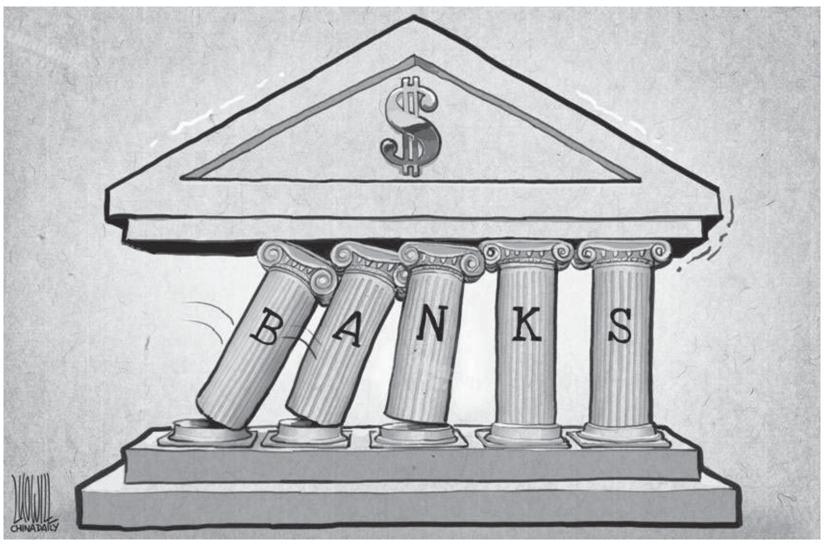
China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254(0)20 242 8589 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

China should help Mongolia restore its ecological balance

The dust and sand weather has set in across a number of northern Chinese cities, including Beijing, Shizuishan in Ningxia, Changchun in Jilin, and Shijiazhuang in Hebei in the past days, with the smell of sediment filling the air.

In recent years sandstorms seemed to be saying goodbye to China's northern regions, so the latest incursion makes people wonder if they can really be eliminated for good.

China's northern regions have been reporting fewer dust storms over the years, proof that the country's dust control efforts — such as national greening, afforestation, and shelterbelt building projects launched in the past decades across its northwestern, northern and northeastern regions — have paid off.

According to statistics provided by the United Nations, China ranks first in newly-increased global green areas in the world, being responsible for more than 25 percent of new green areas from 2000 to 2017.

However, China's dust control measures have primarily focused on controlling dust sources, which can be reduced by planting shelterbelts. However, they cannot be completely controlled, as they are usually 10-20 meters in height, while some dust particles (diameter 0.05-0.005 millimeter) can rise to altitudes of 1.5 kilometers; in fact clay particles (diameter less than 0.005 mm) can fly even higher.

Since forests cannot completely block dust from floating, building shelterbelts alone will not do. Sand-fixation strategies, such as planting sod and improving the roughness of sandy areas to reduce dust from flying during strong winds, are needed.

A combination of trees, shrubs, semi-shrubs and herbs along with facilities such as nylon mesh sand barriers, simulated plant sand barriers, mesh bag sand barriers and chemical sand fixing agents are needed to improve the surface tension of sandy areas. But it takes decades of efforts and patience to achieve significant results.

It should also be noted that 70 percent of the land in Mongolia is facing desertification, becoming the source of sand and dust that makes its way to China, the Republic of Korea, Japan and even the United States. This means dust treatment requires the efforts of multiple countries and international cooperation.

Given that restoring Mongolia's ecological balance and preventing its land desertification are important ways to reduce sand storms and dusty weather, China might invest in and assist Mongolia through the Belt and Road Initiative, to restore its ecological balance and reduce the source of dust.

— BEIJING NEWS

Ukraine needs peace not more munitions

The United Kingdom has announced it will provide depleted uranium armor-piercing rounds to Ukraine for its main battle tanks, a move that will cause more harm than good to the country in the midst of a military conflict.

Arming Ukraine with the shells further escalates the military conflict, with each such step pushing the country further away from peace.

Depleted uranium is a heavy metal that is highly toxic and radioactive. If used in battle, the residue from the shells will continue contaminating the soil, posing a health hazard to residents.

It could enter the bodies of residents and remain there for decades. In fact, three decades after the Gulf War, those who served in the war are still reporting complications from uranium in their bodies, something that should not be repeated in Ukraine.

Of course, the UK cares little about the ramifications of arming Ukraine, for it is not UK soil that will be contaminated. Neither will it be UK farmers who will have to plough radioactive land.

The British can continue enjoying their afternoon tea in London after having added fuel to the fire in Ukraine, and having helped their arms dealers at the cost of Ukrainian people's health and lives. To quote a US media report at the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict a year ago, the US will fight Russia until the last Ukrainian.

True hope for Ukraine lies not in the depleted uranium rounds the UK will provide, but on the negotiation table. What Ukraine needs is an end to the bloodshed, people returning to their posts, farmers ploughing land and workers manufacturing truck parts.

It is time the West took a lesson from China, which facilitated a deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia to reestablish diplomatic ties. Similarly, the two Slavic brothers, Ukraine and Russia, too, need peace.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

County economy can spur urbanization

The past urbanization in China was characterized by a high concentration of economic activity in the big cities. But this pattern is no longer sustainable, as the megalopolises, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou, and many of the provincial capitals are short of new space, and the low birthrate in the big cities directly influences the demographic structure of the country.

China should therefore attach more importance to the urbanization of its counties rather than continuing to transfer most of the quality capital, technology and talent to the megacities.

For thousands of years, counties have been an important link between cities and villages. The stability and prosperity of counties serve as the foundation for that of cities as well as villages. It is not an accident that the Yangtze River Delta and Pearl River Delta, which are the most prosperous areas in the country, both have strong county economies.

Counties should be encouraged to concentrate on promoting the development of modern agriculture and their own competitive industries that suit the local conditions to create jobs and cultivate the growth of the middle-income group.

The provincial-level authorities should grant the counties more autonomy to make and implement their own socioeconomic development plans, while strengthening their coordination of the work so as to avoid homogeneous competition among them.

Zhejiang province has done a good job in that regard. It has nurtured diversified competition among its counties, many of which have their own competitive industries that are integral to the province's overall industrial system.

At the same time reform of the rural land system should be accelerated to better protect arable land as well as farmers' rights and interests in the process of urbanization.

Last but not least, it is imperative that the ongoing reform of social security, medical care, education, public housing and other systems should take into account the concerns of farmers to ensure urban public services and social security can fully cover migrant workers. This is an issue that should be focused on when discussing the development of counties, and it is also the key to fundamentally solving the problem of the balance between urban and rural development.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

VIEWS

Khalid Taimur Akram

A strong China boon for global peace

The re-election of Xi Jinping as China's president shows the great confidence the Communist Party of China, and the Chinese people and government have in his leadership. They also believe he will lead China to greater prosperity and help realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Under the leadership of Xi, China will explore new horizons to achieve innovation-driven high-quality development as opposed to fast-paced quantitative growth.

Xi's re-election is the culmination of the remarkable achievements China has made over the past 10 years. But the new leadership's journey will be long, filled with both glory and difficulties. The road map has been drawn, and the leadership will forge ahead with enterprise and fortitude to create an even brighter future for the Chinese people.

Xi's vision includes strengthening China's global standing and creating a more prosperous society. He has already led the country in eradicating extreme poverty, and has been a strong advocate of environmental protection and innovation-driven development.

Xi has made many ambitious initiatives during his 10 years in office including the Belt and Road Initiative and the "Made in China 2025" plan, which are aimed at improving infrastructure connectivity among countries and sharpening China's economic and technological competitive edge on the global stage. He has also emphasized the importance of rule of law, good governance and Party discipline, which found resonance in his high-profile anti-corruption campaign.

The president's vision bolstered the country's development, transforming China into a moderately well-off society in all respects. During his leadership, China has made greater contributions to global peace and development. China's visionary policies for development and peace are reflected in Xi's proposals of Global Development Initiative and Global Security Initiative.

More important, thanks to Xi's leadership, China could broker peace between Saudi Arabia and Iran, with the two countries pledging to resume diplomatic relations after seven years, following closed-door talks from March 6 to 10.

Saudi Arabia, Iran, and China issued a joint trilateral statement in Beijing recently to announce the historic diplomatic breakthrough. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to abide by the principles of the United Nations Charter, resolve their disputes through dialogue, respect each other's sovereignty and not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.

The Saudi Arabia-Iran agreement sets an apt example for countries to resolve their disputes and differences through dialogue, and establish good neighborly and friendly relations without external meddling.

Saudi Arabia and Iran also reaffirmed their adherence to the basic norms of international relations and international law.

China played a key role in bringing the two Middle East countries together, showing that its call for global peace and development is not empty talk — unlike the United States which, in the name of spreading democracy and freedom, has been interfering in other countries' internal affairs and creating chaos in many parts of the world, including the Middle East and East Asia. Its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq are tragic examples of what such interference and intervention can unleash in developing countries.

The US has been promoting its hegemonic agenda in the Middle East, turning the region into a battleground. In contrast, China's recent achievement in mediating a rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran shows that an able and honest global leadership can restore peace and bring development to countries.

The author is the executive director of the Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future, Islamabad.
The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Zhou Qi and Yang Weichao

US prisoners have become modern slaves

Americans tend to be indignant about "forced labor" in other countries but are unaware of the prevalence of forced labor in their own country. According to a report, "Captive Labor: Exploitation of Incarcerated Workers", published by the American Civil Liberties Union and the University of Chicago Law School's Global Human Rights Clinic on June 15, 2022, about two-thirds of the 1.2 million incarcerated people in federal and state prisons are subjected to "forced labor".

The about 800,000 "incarcerated workers" do many of the jobs that normal workers do, but with two key differences. First, prison workers are completely controlled by their bosses. And second, they are exploited and abused. As such, prison labor in the US is nothing but "modern slavery."

The 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime. This means that, even though the 13th Amendment states that citizens should be protected against slavery and involuntary servitude, the state can force prisoners to work against their will.

The International Labour Organization's Forced Labour Convention (1930) and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (1957) have been accepted by 180 and 178 countries respectively and have become part of basic human rights. But the US has ratified only the latter, but not the former, arguing that it restricts the use of prison laborers by the private sector.

Prison laborers get little or no pay for the work they do. In 2021, the average pay was 13-52 cents per hour in the US, which has remained stagnant for years. But despite the wages being so low, the government takes up to 80 percent of the wages for "room and board" costs, restitution and other fees such as building and sustaining prisons.

As a result, when prisoners are released, they have little or no money and face discrimination and state occupational licensing restrictions that prevent them from working in the fields in which they were trained in prison.

With prison laborers paid so little, their families have to bear the loss of income due to the loss of labor as well as support for their incarcerated family member. In 2019, such families spent about $2.9 billion on their prison accounts and phone calls, and more than half of the families were forced to take loans to cover these costs.

Yet prison laborers in the US produce more than $2 billion worth of goods and provide more than $9 billion worth in maintenance services annually. Another 8 percent of the prison labor-force is assigned to public works projects, including maintaining cemeteries, school grounds and parks; building roads and houses; and disposing garbage and hazardous materials.

At least 30 US states count prison laborers as a source of labor in their disaster and emergency response action plans. And in 14 states, prison firefighters are deployed to douse wildfires.

Less than 1 percent of the prison budget goes to pay prison laborers, but more than two-thirds are used to pay prison officials. Still, some government officials have voiced opposition to reducing the prison and prison population, because it would reduce the number of prison laborers. Although the number of prisoners in the US has fallen steadily since 2008, the country still has the highest incarceration rate in the world. When prison labor is used as cheap labor, the US judiciary is held hostage to private desires.

The condition of prison laborers worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time when most people in the US chose to stay at home to avoid contracting the novel coronavirus, prison laborers were forced to work outside the prisons and were thus exposed to the virus. Those refusing to work were threatened with solitary confinement or other punishments.

Almost every state has reported the participation of prison workers in containing the pandemic, with prison workers in Michigan, Missouri, New York, Oregon and Texas being at the highest risk of exposure to the virus. They were forced to do the laundry for hospitals, work in mobile morgues, transport bodies, make coffins and dig mass graves.

While prison workers in more than 40 states were required to produce face masks, hand sanitizers, and personal protective equipment during early pandemic-induced lockdowns, they themselves could not use them. Florida prisons suspended inmates' meeting with their families for safety reasons, but still forced the prisoners to build roads, unclog sewers and provide government relocation assistance.

According to the US COVID Prison Project, as of Aug 26, 2022, the number of inmates infected with COVID-19 exceeded 614,000, with about 3,000 deaths. Even as the pandemic raged in the US, 16 states didn't include incarcerated people in their phase one vaccination drive.

According to a 2021 Bureau of Justice Statistics survey, the majority of prison workers (over 70 percent) said the most important purpose of their work is to acquire vocational skills that they can use to build careers after release, but prison labor programs hardly meet their expectations. In fact, the vast majority of work in prisons involves monotonous or repetitive tasks. Job training programs in US prisons are shrinking, and a major share of the work is maintenance and repairs. As a result, when prisoners are released, they have little or no money and face discrimination and state occupational licensing restrictions that prevent them from working in the fields in which they were trained in prison.

"The U.S. prison system claims to offer rehabilitation to its population, but prison labor programs do just the opposite," says Mariana Rosenblat, a faculty member at the University of Chicago and a fellow at the Global Human Rights Clinic.

American politicians claim to be firm defenders of human rights. In the face of forced labor and exploitation in US prisons, shouldn't they do some serious soul searching?

Zhou Qi is a researcher at the Institute of American Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Yang Weichao is a PhD student at the University of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.
The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

Chen Weihua

The author is chief of China Daily EU Bureau based in Brussels.
chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

Iraq War points to Washington's worst violation of human rights

The US government has been issuing reports on human rights practices in every other country on the planet since 1977 without ever publishing one on itself. Such finger-pointing, often blindly, appears especially ironic this year because of what the reports released on March 20, the 20th anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq, say.

However, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken did not even mention the disastrous Iraq War at his news conference on Monday. The US invasion of Iraq, with the active support of countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia, was based on lies. Former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had not stockpiled weapons of mass destruction, which the US used as a pretext to invade Iraq. Besides, the US commission on the Sept 11, 2001, attacks concluded there was no evidence to show any relationship between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaida.

Between 100,000 and 500,000 Iraqis, according to different estimates, were killed in the Iraq War and more than 9 million were forced to flee their homes and become refugees or seek shelter elsewhere in the country. But the real cost is much higher because a large number of people died as an indirect cause of the war such as lack of access to medical care, and non-availability of food and safe drinking water.

The US government would be better served if it publishes a report on its own human rights record instead of ignoring the mess at home and pointing fingers at others.

If the Iraq War, supported by both parties and endorsed by many news outlets including The New York Times, is not the worst human rights violation, or a war crime or crime against humanity in the 21st century, then what constitutes human rights violation or war crime?

Claiming that the Iraq War was not a crime against humanity is like arguing that impoverishing innocent people in Cuba, Iran, Venezuela, Afghanistan and Syria, by imposing barbaric economic sanctions on those countries, as well as depriving women and children of food and medicine, is not a crime against humanity or human rights violation.

The Iraq War has caused untold suffering to not just the Iraqi people but also people in the rest of the Middle East and even Europe, which encountered wave after wave of Iraqi refugees.

Besides, the 20-year-long US war in and occupation of Afghanistan, NATO's invasion and bombing of Libya in 2011 and Washington's drone strikes on a dozen or so Muslim countries are among the worst human rights violations and war crimes.

Yet on the 20th anniversary of the Iraq War, there was such a deafening collective silence among Western politicians who like to lecture the world about human rights and accuse other countries of committing war crimes or crimes against humanity.

No wonder even Tibor Nagy, a former US assistant secretary of state for Africa and former US ambassador to Guinea and Ethiopia, said in a tweet on Tuesday that it was never pleasant delivering the annual US human rights report to host country officials. "They always asked: 'Where is report on HR practices in US itself?'" wrote Nagy, adding that "that was, and remains, a great question!"

On the other hand, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador lashed out at US hypocrisy on Tuesday, calling the US reports "lies" and stressing that the US "cannot talk about human rights with Julian Assange detained, cartel violence with US President Joe Biden bombing the Nord Stream, or democracy while arresting the leading presidential candidate Donald Trump".

The US government has weaponized human rights, but the world can no longer be easily fooled. The US has invaded and bombed more countries and waged more wars than any other country over the past decades.

Domestically, the staggering racial disparity including the 6:1 wealth gap between white and black Americans is probably the biggest human rights violation by the US administration. And the US Supreme Court overturning Roe v Wade in June 2022 is the biggest human rights violation against women.

The US government would be better served if it publishes a report on its own human rights record instead of ignoring the mess at home and pointing fingers at others.

WORLD

Cooperation sought to reap benefits

Sino-African enterprises aim to turn challenges into opportunities

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya
otiato@chinadaily.com.cn

When Chinese company Sunda International started business in Kenya 13 years ago, it faced myriad challenges. Among the major challenges was the lack of skilled labor to fill various positions in the company.

Bob Xian, Sunda International's finance director for East Africa, said the company opened its office in 2010 and started with selling baby diapers and sanitary pads. In 2016, it moved into local manufacturing. And by 2019, it had established a factory producing hygiene products like baby diapers, pads and sanitary towels in Kenya's Athi River town.

"When we started manufacturing, we resolved to use local labor and so far, we have over 600 local employees. In most instances, this meant training the local workforce on the skills necessary in their areas of employment," Xian said. "As a result, we ended up providing skills and technology transfer to the local people, while ensuring we have the best-trained workforce to deliver quality products."

He was speaking during a seminar on Wednesday organized by the Stanbic Bank in Kenya, where the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China participated as a strategic partner in looking at the challenges and opportunities for Chinese businesses operating in Kenya.

While giving the opening remarks for the seminar, Zhang Yijun, minister counselor at the Chinese embassy in Kenya, said China believes that numerous opportunities exist for cooperation that will outlast whatever challenges that come in the way.

He added that Chinese people have embarked on a new journey of achieving a new socialist modernization and their belief in shared prosperity makes cooperation with Africa important. It is the spirit of turning challenges into opportunities that Xian said has made his company flourish in East Africa.

"By working with other Chinese companies and the embassy, we get pointers on how to operate in the local environment, what to avoid and how to abide by local regulations. Since 90 percent of our employees are local, cultural and language differences were a challenge in the beginning, but we have been able to identify areas where we can interact and have cultural exchanges with locals," Xian said.

Solving problems

Jeremy Stevens, Stanbic Bank's economist in Beijing, said Chinese companies can thrive in Africa because they seek to solve local challenges like informal labor and a low manufacturing capacity.

He added that with over 60 percent of Africans viewing China as a force in domestic development, there is more room for expansion in trade especially in areas like agriculture and real estate development.

Xian said Chinese businesses still face some challenges like high energy costs in some countries and the current inflation hitting the region is a new challenge since the local exchange rate to the US dollar makes the importation of materials costly.

Jibran Qureishi, head of Africa research at Stanbic Bank, said that despite recent challenges, sub-Saharan Africa's growth is resilient. He said the tourism sector, floriculture and horticulture are sectors that are looking up in the post-pandemic period and will help the region with forex earnings.

In full bloom

Visitors ride boats next to blooming cherry blossoms at Chidorigafuchi Park in Tokyo, Japan, on Wednesday. The Japan Meteorological Agency announced that cherry blossoms in Tokyo, which came nine days earlier than average, are in full bloom. ISSEI KATO / REUTERS

Thailand launches LMC-backed projects

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok
yangwanli@chinadaily.com.cn

Thailand launched a total of 18 projects supported by the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund on Thursday, aiming to address challenges in the Mekong subregion such as food and energy security.

Those projects, covering a wide range of fields, including agriculture, forestry and fisheries, food safety, public health and youth development, will be implemented by seven Thai departments.

Thursday marked the seventh anniversary of the first LMC Leaders' Meeting. Seven years ago, leaders from Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, met in China and affirmed their determination to work together to promote peace, stability and sustainable development in the Lancang-Mekong subregion.

The Lancang-Mekong River is a vital waterway for cross-border shipping, with the upper reaches of the river known as the Lancang River in China, and the Mekong River in the other five Southeast Asian countries it flows through.

The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund, which was launched by the LMC countries to enable concrete and effective cooperation between the member countries, has provided more than 600 development projects across the subregion, including 59 projects from Thailand.

"Those newly launched projects in Thailand are not only in line with the development priorities, but also address the issues in the Mekong subregion and draw a balance between economic recovery and environmental protection," said Chairat Sirivat, ambassador of the Mekong Cooperation Unit at the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At a news conference on Thursday in Bangkok, Permanent Secretary of the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sarun Charoensuwan announced that Thailand is set to take over the co-chairmanship of the LMC with China for the next two years. A ceremony is expected to be held after the 4th LMC Leaders' Meeting scheduled to be held later this year.

"The Mekong subregion is at the heart of Thailand's foreign policy. Thailand's prosperity, security and stability and those in the Mekong subregion are inextricably linked to one another," he said.

He said Thailand wishes to see the subregion where all the countries are united in solidarity, move forward together in a sustainable manner and jointly drive forward concrete cooperation on the basis of consensus and mutual benefit.

"Therefore, Thailand and the subregion would strongly and steadily recover from the past crisis with prosperity and sustainability, as well as move toward the future in full confidence," he said.

Han Zhiqiang, Chinese ambassador to Thailand, recalled the achievements that the six member countries have made over the past years, including the high-quality projects that have benefited people's livelihoods and boosted regional prosperity and stability.

"We drink from the same river, and our destiny is closely linked. The Lancang-Mekong River connects China and Thailand tightly," Han said.

He said China is willing to continue to work with all parties of Thailand to implement the important consensus reached by leaders of the two countries, and accelerate the building of the China-Thailand community with a shared future.

"With joint efforts of all parties, the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation will contribute wisdom to the economic recovery of the six countries, inject impetus to regional prosperity and revitalization, and provide assistance for the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," he said.

Opposition voiced over possible ban on TikTok

WASHINGTON — TikTok creators and some US Democratic Party lawmakers on Wednesday said they opposed any potential ban on the short video-sharing app that is used by more than 150 million US citizens.

Representatives Jamaal Bowman, Mark Pocan and Robert Garcia and TikTok creators called at a news conference in Washington for broad-based privacy legislation that would address all large social media companies.

"Why the hysteria and the panic and the targeting of TikTok?" Bowman asked. "Let's do the right thing here — comprehensive social media reform as it relates to privacy and security."

Creators talked on Wednesday about posting videos of baking cakes or selling greeting cards to TikTok followers. Some held up signs saying TikTok benefits small businesses. TikTok, owned by China's ByteDance, says 5 million businesses use the app.

TikTok creator Jason Linton uses TikTok to share videos of his three adopted children in Oklahoma and has interacted with people around the world.

"I am asking our politicians — don't take away the community that we've all built — a community that lasts, that loves," Linton said at the news conference.

A group of teenagers, teachers and business owners rallied on Wednesday at the US Capitol to express their opposition to a potential ban.

"Are there other platforms out there? Absolutely — I'm on them. But none of them have the reach that TikTok has," aspiring soapmaking entrepreneur @countrylather2020 told her 70,000 followers in a video recorded after she arrived in Washington.

TikTok has announced it will spend $1.5 billion on a plan known as "Project Texas" to bolster data security in storing US-based user data on the servers of US tech company Oracle.

Fair environment urged

On March 16, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a daily news briefing: "The US has yet to prove with evidence that TikTok threatens its national security. It should stop spreading disinformation about data security, stop suppressing relevant companies, and provide an open, fair, just and nondiscriminatory environment for foreign businesses to invest and operate in the US."

On Thursday, TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew was expected to testify before the US House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Chew, a 40-year-old Singaporean who was appointed CEO in 2021, said in a TikTok video this week that the congressional hearing comes at a "pivotal moment" for the company, The Associated Press reported.

Chew said a TikTok ban would hurt the US economy and small US businesses that use the app to sell their products, while reducing competition in an "increasingly concentrated market".

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Deadly Denver shooting adds to fury in US over gun violence

DENVER, Colorado — Gun violence is still rampant in the United States as more and more people are shot and citizens are growing angrier.

On Wednesday, a 17-year-old student wounded two administrators at the East High School in Denver. The student was later found dead near his vehicle. The suspect Austin Lyle was being patted down as part of a search for weapons when he produced a handgun and began shooting, local police said.

Parents of students converged on the campus on Wednesday and blamed officials for not doing enough to protect their children.

"I am sick of it," said Jesse Haase, who planned to talk to her daughter about taking her out of classes for the rest of the school year.

Students leave East High School following a school shooting in Denver, Colorado, on Wednesday. HYOUNG CHANG VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Some students vented their frustration over violence at the school as they surrounded police chief Ron Thomas. "This is the reality of being young in America: sitting through a shooting and waiting for information just hours before you're scheduled to testify in support of gun safety bills," said Gracie Taub, a 16-year-old East High School sophomore and volunteer with Students Demand Action in Colorado.

In response to the shooting, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre just repeated President Joe Biden's call for stricter gun laws, and for Congress to "do something" on gun control.

The school is frequently shaken by violence. The bloodshed came three years after the Denver school board voted to eliminate its program of assigning armed city police officers, known as school resources officers, to its public school campuses, relying instead on the school district's own security team.

Wednesday was the second anniversary of 10 people being shot and killed at a supermarket in Boulder, Colorado.

On Tuesday night, a former soldier shot and killed three children in South Carolina. The man then killed himself.

Gun violence has become increasingly common in the US with more than 1,300 shooting incidents recorded between 2000 and June 2022, according to government researchers cited by The Associated Press.

Gun Violence Archive recorded more than 6,000 deaths and injuries to teenagers and children last year.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Argentina reels under hyperinflation ahead of polls

By SERGIO HELD in Bogota, Colombia
For China Daily

Argentina's annual inflation rate hit 102.5 percent in February, the first time in more than three decades that it topped the 100 percent mark.

The soaring prices forced the Central Bank of Argentina to raise its benchmark interest rate by 300 basis points to 78 percent on March 16.

Internal and external factors like US monetary policy are responsible for skyrocketing inflation in Argentina, economist Hernan Bergstein said recently in an interview with Xinhua News Agency.

US price hikes, a jump in international raw material prices and US Federal Reserve interest rate increases generate turbulence in the balance of payments of peripheral economies, including Argentina, which significantly impacts debt conditions, said the economics professor at the National University of Quilmes, an Argentine university.

He explained that the jump in commodity prices has negatively impacted Argentina through imports of primary goods such as energy with a consequent increase in finished products.

The fast price increases are making life challenging for people, which marks a continuation of decades of economic turmoil.

"It is exceedingly difficult to have a price reference even for food. The supermarkets charge what they want, they do not respect fixed prices. It is difficult to live day to day, with the inflation so high," Fernando Pileggi, a taxi driver in Buenos Aires, said.

In November, the government introduced curbs on prices at supermarkets in a failed attempt to contain soaring costs, reviving an old economic policy. In February, food and nonalcoholic beverage prices rose 9.8 percent from a month earlier. Overall, prices rose 6.6 percent from January.

Price caps on food and staples date to the 1950s and were reintroduced by former president Nestor Kirchner during his term between 2003 and 2007.

Twenty years later, Argentinians continue to struggle with inflation, and not only at the supermarkets. All economic sectors now adjust prices frequently so as not to be left behind by the rampant rising costs.

In the capital Buenos Aires, the local government announced a price increase for taxi fares and tolls, which are being adjusted up by 50 percent and 65 percent respectively, starting this month.

Pileggi, who often plies the airport to city route, said he benefits from receiving US dollars, euros and Brazilian reais from his customers and exchanging them afterward in the parallel market. Access to foreign currency is capped and controlled by the government, but a parallel market moves almost freely in the streets of cities like Buenos Aires.

"The lack of dollars that we are experiencing due to the bad harvest as a result of the drought, puts pressure on the government, which has no way to finance itself. And that means more inflation … and slowly we see how it is more and more difficult to get imported products or supplies," Miguel Boggiano, CEO and chief investment officer at Carta Financiera, said.

Argentina, like neighboring Uruguay and Chile, has been struggling with a series of droughts and elevated temperatures that have deeply affected farm production during the current 2022-23 summer season in the Southern Cone.

For Boggiano, the only way out of the inflationary spiral affecting the country may be a radical change in how the problem is approached.

Bergstein said US interest rate hikes would affect Argentina through the devaluation of exports, capital outflow and an increase in the cost of debt in US dollars.

People walk by mannequins displaying Argentina's national team's kit on March 15 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. TOMAS CUESTA / GETTY IMAGES

Argentina will head to the polls for general elections in October, and inflation is one of the most important topics.

"The only way to fix Argentina's problem is to lower public spending, decrease money printing, and increase the international reserves, which is a classic International Monetary Fund adjustment," said Alberto Bernal, chief emerging markets and global strategist at financial services firm XP Investments.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

WORLD

Washington urged to adopt responsible fiscal policy

By WANG QINGYUN
wangqingyun@chinadaily.com.cn

The US should adopt responsible macroeconomic policies and avoid radical policy shifts that may cause serious spillover effects similar to the 2008 global financial crisis, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said, as the failure of Silicon Valley Bank sent shock waves throughout the global financial market.

The collapse of the bank, which was shut down by United States regulators on March 10, marks the largest bank failure in the US since Washington Mutual in September 2008.

The Federal Reserve's fast pace of interest rate hikes over the past year is considered one of the major causes for SVB's collapse.

MarketWatch, a business news website, cited a study released earlier this month and said that "186 US banks remain vulnerable to a run on deposits like the one that doomed Silicon Valley Bank".

"We are closely following relevant developments," Wang said on Thursday.

As financial systems around the world are interconnected deeply, problems of US banks by no means impact only the US, the spokesman said.

The US has a responsibility to increase transparency, enhance communication with the rest of the world, and provide clarity on a series of widespread concerns among the world, including the exact size of the risk, steps to address it and ways to minimize its spillover, according to Wang.

The US dollar is an international currency, thus the US should assess with caution any potential negative spillover of its monetary policies, instead of simply anchoring the policies to its domestic economic regulation goals, the spokesman said.

Wang urged the US to take effective measures to stabilize market expectations and investor confidence, and called on relevant countries to take concrete steps to keep money safe for all clients, including foreign depositors.

China will work with other economies to enhance macroeconomic policy coordination and uphold international economic and financial stability, the spokesman said.

Unleashing anger

Protesters walk next to a damaged and burning road sign gantry at the entrance to the Pont de Saint-Nazaire, in Saint-Nazaire, western France, on Wednesday, after the French government pushed the pensions reform through parliament without a vote. LOIC VENANCE / AFP

US doctors switch to 'concierge medicine'

By BELINDA ROBINSON
in New York
belindarobinson@chinadailyusa.com

Doctors in the United States appear to be turning to "concierge medicine", a service in which they charge patients a fee to reduce waiting times while also lowering heavy patient loads.

Concierge medicine has been offered for more than 20 years in the US. At least 1 in 5 people with the highest incomes in the US have been getting such healthcare for years, a 2020 study by National Public Radio, or NPR, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health found.

With concierge medicine, physicians charge the patient a membership fee. They also charge the patient's insurance company or Medicare, a government national health insurance program in the US, for the doctor visit and any services not covered by the membership fee.

The fee for concierge medicine depends on the healthcare provider and the state where the patient lives. It ranges from $2,200 to $30,000 per year. It is usually paid in lump-sum, but some plans may allow monthly payments.

Another type of medical service, known as "direct primary care", or DPC, charges patients a flat fee that covers everything, including lab tests and visits.

Popular trend

As it becomes more popular, there are concerns that concierge medicine could penalize those with low incomes. As more primary care providers join concierge practices, fewer physicians are available to provide general medical treatment.

There is an expected doctor shortage in the US of between 37,800 and 124,000 in both primary and specialty care by 2034, according to data from the Association of American Medical Colleges published in June 2021.

Specialdocs Consultants, based in Illinois, has helped doctors switch from conventional care to concierge medicine since 2002. It has approximately 120 clients across the US.

Terrence Bauer, CEO of Specialdocs, said concierge medicine provides benefits to doctors and patients.

"As reimbursement goes down and their (doctors') operating costs go up, the only way to make the math work is to see more patients, and they get to the point where it's just unsustainable. I mean, how many patients can you see in a day?" he told China Daily.

"For physicians, (concierge medicine) is a dramatically different work-life balance, as opposed to today (where) they have to see more patients just to make ends meet. They get the opportunity to really focus on health and wellness and the disease, not just on the symptoms of the day."

Agencies contributed to this story.

Artistic representation

British artist John Dyer holds his work while posing for a photo with a northern white rhino at Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya on March 8. The Eden Project's artist-in-residence was in Kenya to paint the last two surviving northern white rhinos. NEWSCOM

Asia-Pacific lags behind in development goals

UN official calls for reflection on SDG progress at the 'opportune moment'

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok and PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong

Many economies in the Asia-Pacific will be missing the 2030 target year for achieving UN Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, at the current pace, a UN agency report said on Wednesday.

Produced by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, or ESCAP, the 2023 Asia-Pacific SDG Progress Report finds that overall progress in the region is slow on 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets.

"Based on current trends, the region will still take another 42 years to reach the goal post" although only seven years are left, it said.

"This is an opportune moment to reflect on progress in the Asia-Pacific region toward achieving the SDGs, as well as being reminded of the significant work that remains to be done," said Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, under-secretary-general and executive secretary of ESCAP.

"The region should have made 50 percent of the progress needed to achieve the goals, yet the overall progress has reached only 14.4 percent, which could result in substantial delays in accomplishing our 2030 ambitions," she said.

Of the 17 goals being investigated, progress toward climate action is slipping away the most. The region is both a victim of the impact of climate change and a perpetrator of climate change, with a responsibility to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The report also indicated that the region is regressing on the increase in deaths and missing persons attributed to disasters.

While the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has yet to be quantified, she said data on a limited number of indicators are beginning to reveal impacts on people, planet and prosperity.

"Climate change continues to regress and must be given priority to reverse negative trends. This might be a crucial factor that influences the region's pace toward the SDG target and needs to be improved by joining hands with all countries," she added.

Harrowing dangers

"Without action, this region is projected to miss 90 percent of its 118 targets by 2030, and this is unacceptable," said Renato Redentor Constantino, a climate policy consultant based in Manila, Philippines, noting the report's conclusions affirm the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's latest synthesis report, highlighting the harrowing dangers and immense opportunities facing Asia and the Pacific.

A huge factor behind this is the continued refusal of policymakers to see how intrinsic the links are between the need to establish resilience and sustainable development and the transition to a low-carbon economy, Constantino said. "When will so-called advanced nations finally take responsibility and act like adults?"

To confront the climate emergency, and to truly realize the region's SDGs, world leaders must stop grousing and do everything they can everywhere, all at once. "We expect far more drastic decarbonization action from big emitters as well as dramatic increases in finance from wealthy economies," Constantino said.

Fermin Adriano, economist and former Philippine agriculture undersecretary, said countries that fall behind in attaining SDGs need to focus on farm productivity to increase food supply and lower prices.

"I don't see the Philippines achieving 'Zero Hunger' in 2030. In fact, despite sustained economic growth during (the previous administrations), the levels of malnutrition, stunting and hunger only incrementally declined compared with the high economic growth rate registered," Adriano said.

Although data availability on SDGs has doubled since 2017, data remain insufficient for 51 out of 169 targets, according to Rachael Beaven, director of the statistics division under the ESCAP.

"Governments must renew their commitments to producing relevant, timely, granular, high-quality information to monitor and review the march toward the Sustainable Development Goals," said Beaven.

Despite the slow pace of progress in the region overall, there are areas where some countries have made faster progress and remarkable achievements, said the report.

Contact the writers at yangwanli@chinadaily.com.cn.

Millets may help ensure food security in Africa

By EDITH MUTETHYA
in Nairobi, Kenya
edithmutethya@chinadaily.com.cn

African countries have been encouraged to increase millets production due to their potential in addressing climate change, boosting nutrition and increasing farmers' incomes.

At the UN Food and Agriculture Organization event held in Ghana's capital Accra on Friday, government officials and experts said millets could help Africa in its quest for food security because they are easy to plant, can withstand adverse climatic conditions, and can grow in degraded lands.

They said millets, which include sorghum, pearl millet, finger millet, amaranth, fonio and teff, can grow on arid lands with minimal inputs and maintenance, are tolerant or resistant to diseases and pests, and are more resilient to climate shocks than other cereals.

Currently, 146 million people are facing a crisis or acute food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Climatic shocks

The situation is attributed to climatic shocks such as prolonged drought, conflict, recurrent flooding and economic downturns exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2023 as the International Year of Millets to promote it as an alternative crop and also address the serious issue of food security and environmental problems caused by the cultivation of traditional crops such as rice and wheat in many parts of the world.

Abebe Haile-Gabriel, FAO assistant director-general and regional representative for Africa, said millets have a lot of potential to transform the continent's agri-food system.

"Let's increase productivity, and add value through processing to benefit producers, especially women, as well as consumers," he said.

Haile-Gabriel urged governments and policymakers to prioritize the production and trade of millets, take legislative actions to promote their cultivation and innovative methods for harvest and post-harvest processes.

He said millets could also be put on the menu at public schools and hospitals, noting that the grains packed with minerals including iron, fiber, antioxidants and protein, have a low glycemic index and are gluten-free.

Fatmata Binta, an advocate for fonio and who is collaborating with the FAO throughout the International Year of Millets 2023, said fonio is easy to grow, doesn't require too much plowing of the land and can be harvested within 8 to 12 weeks.

"It has so many benefits, so it is something we need to add to our diet," she said. "We are talking a lot about sourcing locally, connecting with farmers, and I think it's important now to start using ingredients that are underutilized."

The FAO said greater consumption of millets could offer opportunities to smallholder farmers through sustainable increased production.

"By promoting millets and regaining market opportunities, additional sources of revenue can be created for smallholders," the UN agency said.

The FAO said the private sector could invest in the sustainable production of millets by facilitating access to credit or other financial support, millet-specific training, farming equipment and new technologies that improve the processing of millets.

The UN agency said, despite their history and nutritional value, millets account for less than 3 percent of the global grains trade.

Race against time to rescue wine grapes in Argentina

VISTA FLORES, Argentina — At the foot of the Andes in Argentina's Valle de Uco wine region, frantic picking is underway to try and save what remains of predictably the worst grape harvest in decades.

It is a race against time in the fabled Mendoza wine region in the west of the South American country, which is once again in the grip of La Nina, a periodic weather phenomenon that cools surface temperatures and intensifies drought.

"We hurry … because we are afraid of another frost," enologist Marcelo Pelleriti of the Monteviejo winery told Agence France-Presse. "In a year like this, anything is possible."

Pelleriti said this is "one of the most difficult (seasons) in the wine history of the province of Mendoza" where 78 percent of Argentina's wine — mainly reds — comes from.

The vines suffered much these past months with frost, hail, extreme temperatures and drought.

Cellar master Jose Mounier showed AFP the damage caused by frost at the flowering stage to a cluster of cabernet franc grapes, misshapen beyond recognition.

"Fewer grapes means more work," he said, explaining that pickers have to separate healthy grapes from damaged ones by hand.

"We must still create a wine with these problems in mind."

Monteviejo, a large vineyard between 1,000 and 1,200 meters above sea level, expects to have a harvest 50 percent smaller than last year. Some others in the region have lost everything.

For Argentina as a whole, this year's harvest will not exceed 15.4 million metric tons of grapes, according to projections by the National Institute of Vitiviniculture.

This is about 40 percent less than a "normal" year for a country that oscillates between five and seven on the world's top 10 wine producers' list.

A grape picker loads a plastic storage container full of grapes on a truck during harvest at a winery in Mendoza, Argentina, on March 14.
ANDRES LARROVERE / AFP

The final numbers will be known in May. In 2021, the harvest was 22.2 million tons.

"We are looking at the worst harvest in more than 20 years, perhaps in 60," Mario Gonzalez, president of the Argentine Wine Corporation, said.

Argentina has just emerged from two good commercial wine years, linked directly to increased home consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic. The domestic market accounts for about 70 percent of Argentine wine sales, and reached some 20 or 21 liters per person per year in 2020 and 2021.

Last year, that was down again to about 18 liters.

The 2022 drop "will have a strong impact" on the industry, Gonzalez said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

WORLD

Xi's visit bolsters cause of true multilateralism

Closer China-Russia relations vital to world peace and stability, analysts note

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong
vivienxu@chinadailyapac.com

President Xi Jinping's visit to Russia strengthens the cause of true multilateralism in the world against hegemony and bloc confrontation, while showing Sino-Russian ties as a model for relations between major countries, analysts have said.

Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan, executive director of the Center for South Asia & International Studies in Islamabad, said Russia and China have created a new, positive pattern of international relations between major powers and neighbors.

China and Russia "both stand for a multipolar world, constructive relationship, cooperation and coordination for the benefit of the entire planet", Khan said. "They are not obsessed to start any geopolitical conflicts ... with other countries as the United States does."

Sino-Russian bilateral relations do not have any military-political orientations, the Pakistani expert said, adding that Xi's latest trip has no hidden geopolitical or geostrategic agenda, unlike what was projected by Western media.

"China does not want to indulge or start any 'grand endgame theory' in the region" but simply wants peace and stability, according to Khan, who pointed out that "mutual annual official visits of heads of state of China and Russia have been a tradition since mid-1990s".

Karori Singh, former director of the South Asia Studies Centre at the University of Rajasthan, described the meeting between President Xi and Russian President Vladimir Putin as "deepening relationship in defining times". Xi's trip has global significance as the whole world was keeping an eye on the outcome of the talks, he said.

A responsible power

China attaches importance to its neighbor Russia, Singh said, noting that Xi's first visit was to Moscow when he became Chinese president in 2013, and again he chose to visit Russia first after being elected to a new term this month.

He also noted that Putin has hailed China as a responsible power by referring to the recent Saudi Arabia-Iran agreement that was facilitated by China, as well as Beijing's various programs such as the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative.

According to the Indian professor, the major outcome of Xi's latest Russia trip is twofold. First, signing of bilateral agreements covering a wide range of areas and issues of common concern, from agriculture to technology, including sustaining uninterrupted supply chains. Second, issuing of two joint statements — one, in regard to comprehensive strategic partnership coordination, and the other, in relation to an action plan to deepen development cooperation.

"The joint statements and talks are more positive and focused on reform and rejuvenation of global governance for serving common interests and shared future of humankind, rather than accusing one or a group of countries for present woes of the global community," Singh said.

He added that the major focus of the talks had been on expanding trade and economic relations, strategic partnership and world peace in a win-win framework.

"Obviously, the talks between the two sides are more realistic and of practical significance, rather than rhetorical preaching," he added.

As for the good outcome for international community, Swaran Singh, a professor of diplomacy and disarmament at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, said a key positive is "President Putin accepting and endorsing China's 12-point Peace Proposal on Ukraine crisis".

The expert also said the recent rapprochement China delivered between Iran and Saudi Arabia gives hope that Beijing can achieve similar success in regard to the Ukraine conflict and emerge as a powerful peacemaker of our times.

Scholars: Decade-old speech still inspiring

By XINHUA

Anatoly Torkunov, president of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, or MGIMO, was still excited to recall the memorable speech President Xi Jinping gave at the Russian university a decade ago.

"I can still remember how the auditorium was packed with teachers and students," Torkunov said, referring to the speech Xi delivered on March 23, 2013, during his first state visit to Russia since he was elected president of China.

Torkunov said that Xi's speech was meaningful, deep and thought-provoking and would be significant for any university, especially those focusing on international relations, world politics and economics.

"This was also an opportunity not to just directly listen, but to feel politics. President Xi spoke not only as the leader of a large country, but also as a teacher, because the lecture wasn't only politically meaningful, it was also meaningful from an academic perspective," he added.

Alexander Bobrov, 30, who is now the director of the MGIMO School of Government and International Affairs, also listened to the Chinese president's speech 10 years ago, when he was a student at the university.

"It was a big event for us. We were very glad to see the Chinese leader, who spoke a lot about the development of bilateral relations, and demonstrated great knowledge of Russian culture," Bobrov said.

"He is a very powerful person with will, character, great charisma," Torkunov stressed.

As to Xi's proposal of the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind in his speech, Torkunov said: "We are proud that conceptually this idea was first introduced at our university."

> "President Xi spoke not only as the leader of a large country, but also as a teacher, because the lecture wasn't only politically meaningful, it was also meaningful from an academic perspective."
>
> **Anatoly Torkunov,** president of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations

Torkunov recalled that Xi said that countries are linked with and dependent on one another at a level never seen before, and mankind, living in the same global village, has increasingly emerged as a community with a shared future in which everyone's interests are closely entwined.

Emphasis on equality

Many things in China's political life today are connected in a way with centuries-old and millennia-old Chinese history and are drawn from the teachings of great Chinese philosophers, the MGIMO president said.

Torkunov believes that China fundamentally adheres to this concept and uses it in practice — in the country's development.

In comparison to other theories on international relations, Torkunov said the concept not only profoundly affects many important aspects of national life, but also encompasses the true meaning of development for all.

"Regardless of the size of the economy of any particular country, relations should be built with an emphasis on equality, and it is necessary to seek a peaceful solution to any issue," Torkunov said.

"Ten years have passed but its relevance hasn't declined. It's only becoming more prevalent," Torkunov said, adding that this concept remains important when major changes are taking place now.

Bobrov believes that in today's multipolar world, countries need to establish such international relations.

"The concept will contribute to the progressive development of mankind for many years, or even decades to come," said Bobrov.

Torkunov and Bobrov share the view that Xi's visit to the MGIMO and his speech 10 years ago have played an important role in the development of Russia-China relations.

"It gave us a deeper understanding of China's views on various issues and China's role in modern international life. It also motivated us greatly to study China and Russia-China relations," Torkunov said.

On the same day that Torkunov and Bobrov shared their views on Xi's speech, an event dedicated to Chinese culture and language took place at the MGIMO.

More than 100 teachers and students from many schools in Moscow were invited to participate in a Chinese tea-tasting ceremony, calligraphy and paper-cutting workshops. MGIMO students also took part in discussions held in Chinese.

"We have a large group of students who are studying Chinese. Moreover, today, professors and teachers are actively studying China," Torkunov said.

Runner's 'crazy' adventure focuses on water woes

UNITED NATIONS — Mina Guli went looking for a water problem but discovered a global "catastrophe".

Driven by passion and the testimony of water crisis victims worldwide, the Australian on Wednesday completed her 200th marathon in a year to demand action against a looming disaster.

From her home country's deserts to the glaciers of Tajikistan, from the Amazon rainforest to Africa's parched riverbeds, the self-described reluctant ultramarathoner has covered 8,440 kilometers across 32 countries.

Her remarkable journey concluded when she collapsed into her mother's arms outside United Nations headquarters, where a global water summit is being held through Friday.

An outlandish challenge? "I think I'm crazy too," Guli laughed during a solo run earlier this week in New York's Central Park — her 198th marathon-length outing.

But "I want to raise awareness about the global water crisis", the 52-year-old said.

"I'm not a natural runner," she confessed. "I didn't grow up running. I don't really like running."

But she found that putting one foot in front of the other — marathon after marathon — was the best way to "take the voices of the people from the front lines of this water crisis ... and inspire these government officials, these corporate leaders, to take action".

Guli, a former lawyer who founded and leads the Thirst Foundation which promotes global water awareness, recounted the highlights of this past year's "Run Blue" journey.

"I thought I was going to see a problem, and what I found was a catastrophe," she said, noting the "women and girls who walk for hours every day risking their lives to fetch water".

She crossed dried-up lakes, running "past carcasses of boats lying stranded in the sand", and traversed the high glaciers of Tajikistan, where global warming has precipitated rapid ice melt.

"What I saw was heartbreaking — the (glacier) surface pockmarked with these blue puddles," Guli said. "It's horrifying."

It's one thing to see the crisis displayed by the world's media, the alarming facts and figures laid out in black and white, Guli went on, as tears rolled down her cheeks.

"But when you go there, and you see it for yourself, and you feel the raw emotion, the hurt of these people, you just realize this is far bigger and deeper than anything we could have imagined."

Change takes time

Thousands of delegates gathered just steps away at the UN conference as she broke the blue tape on her final run, high-fiving observers as applause and cheers rang out.

"It's time for our leaders, and particularly our leaders this week, to step up and to listen to those voices, to hear them and to say 'we're going to do everything we can to solve this global water crisis'," Guli said, noting she was "a little sad" her monumental adventure has come to an end.

Back in 2018, the Australian had embarked on a challenge to run 100 marathons in 100 days, but she broke her leg on her 62nd race.

"I thought I could mobilize and create change instantly," she recalled. "The truth is that change takes time."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Mina Guli greets fans after completing her 200th marathon on Wednesday outside UN headquarters. The activist finished the task in a year to demand actions on the water crisis. LEONARDO MUNOZ / AFP

Terrifying incident

Emergency teams rush to the scene after the *Petrel*, a research vessel, was tipped over by strong winds at a 45-degree angle at a dry dock in Edinburgh, Scotland, on Wednesday. Authorities said 21 people were taken to hospital and 12 others were treated for injuries on the quay side. The 76-meter ship was previously bought and outfitted by the late Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen but is no longer owned by his estate, British media reported. ANDY BUCHANAN / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

AUKUS nuclear submarine deal sparks anger from senator, ex-PM

CANBERRA — Australian Senator Jordon Steele-John has slammed the government's nuclear submarine agreement, amid complaints that the United States' move could clear the way for bad actors to escape nuclear oversight in the future.

Earlier in March, under the so-called AUKUS trilateral security partnership, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, US President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak jointly announced Australia's acquisition of nuclear submarines.

Australian officials have estimated the cost of the submarines at between A$268 billion and A$368 billion ($178-$245 billion) over three decades. Eight AUKUS-class submarines will be built in Adelaide in South Australia, with the first to be completed by 2042.

In a recent speech to Parliament, Steele-John, a member of the Australian Greens, criticized the agreement, declaring "it is one of the most catastrophic foreign policy decisions an Australian government has ever entered into".

He said for the A$368 billion spent on eight nuclear-powered submarines, Australians will "get the privilege of becoming a nuclear waste dump" and see their public money subsidize British and US defense manufacturers, adding that the deal "forever shackles us to the United States of America".

Steele-John's comments echoed the sentiment of former Australian prime minister Paul Keating, who slammed the AUKUS pact one day after it was announced as "the worst international decision by an Australian Labor government since the former Labor leader Billy Hughes sought to introduce conscription to augment Australian forces in World War I".

Pandora's box

Rafael Grossi, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has pledged to be "very demanding" in overseeing the planned transfer from the US to Australia.

On March 17, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin urged the US, the United Kingdom and Australia to stop putting their selfish geopolitical agenda above nuclear nonproliferation obligations and stop coercing the IAEA into endorsing their nuclear submarine cooperation.

Wang said the AUKUS group is putting up an Anglo-Saxon clique to advance nuclear submarine cooperation and other cutting-edge military technology cooperation.

"This is typical Cold War mentality and a move that opens a Pandora's box, which will seriously impact regional and global peace and security," Wang said.

"If this attempt succeeds, it forebodes unprecedented threats and challenges to the decades-long stability and prosperity in the region."

Meanwhile, Australia said it will also buy up to 220 Tomahawk cruise missiles from the US after the US State Department approved the sale last week.

Australian officials earlier said the new nuclear-powered submarines would be able to fire the Tomahawk missiles.

The Australian missile purchase comes with a price tag of nearly $900 million. The prime contractor will be Arizona-based Raytheon Missiles and Defense.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Briefly

SWEDEN

Parliament endorses country joining NATO

Sweden's lawmakers overwhelmingly voted on Wednesday in favor of the country joining the NATO. The vote was 269 in favor and 37 against. Forty-three lawmakers were absent. Hungary and Turkiye remain the last two holdouts among the military bloc's 30 members to ratify the accession of Sweden and Finland to the military alliance. Also on Wednesday, a proposal tabled by the Left Party and the Green Party to outlaw nuclear weapons on Sweden's territory in both peace and wartime was voted down in the Parliament, or Riksdag. Sweden and Finland dropped their decadeslong policies of military nonalignment and applied to join NATO last May.

UNITED STATES

Video thrusts brutality back in the spotlight

Disturbing video footage released on Tuesday shows the death of a 28-year-old black man as he was being admitted to a mental hospital, where he was forcibly restrained by as many as 10 police officers and hospital security guards. Irvo Otieno's March 6 death in Virginia has already drawn murder charges against the officers and guards involved, thrusting the spotlight back on US law enforcement brutality and the treatment of mental health patients in particular. The Washington Post published a nine-minute video, drawn from 27 minutes of hospital surveillance footage of the incident.

SOUTH KOREA

Only half of citizens see marriage as a must

Only half of South Koreans saw marriage as a must, reflecting the changed perception of marriage, statistical office data showed on Thursday. According to Statistics Korea's report on the country's social indicators in 2022, 50 percent of South Korean people aged 13 and higher said they should get married. The percentage of those regarding marriage as essential has been on the decline from 64.7 percent in 2010 to 56.8 percent in 2014, 48.1 percent in 2018 and 51.2 percent in 2020. The country's younger generation chose to opt out of marriage and childbirth due to economic difficulties such as high housing prices, high education costs and stubborn youth unemployment.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

BUSINESS

中国日报 CHINA DAILY | CHINADAILY.COM.CN/BUSINESS Friday, March 24, 2023

HIGHER GROUND

Advanced manufacturing tops agenda

More efforts urged for breakthroughs in high-end fields and core tech

By FAN FEIFEI
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

China's emphasis on developing advanced manufacturing is expected to enhance the resilience of its industrial and supply chains, boost the country's core competitiveness globally, and lay a solid foundation for long-term economic growth, said experts and business executives.

They called for accelerated efforts to achieve breakthroughs in core technologies in key fields, given that upgrading the manufacturing sector has been high on China's development agenda as a requirement for bolstering the real economy.

Their comments come on the heels of Premier Li Qiang's call for a big push to develop advanced manufacturing, advance high-end manufacturing and accelerate construction of a modern industrial system.

Li made the remarks during an inspection tour and at a symposium on the development of the advanced manufacturing industry in Hunan province from Tuesday to Wednesday.

Noting the real economy, especially the manufacturing sector, is the foundation of China's economy, he called for efforts to promote the transformation and upgrade of the traditional manufacturing sector, and to advance the development of strategic emerging industries.

"Advanced manufacturing is playing an increasingly crucial role in bolstering technological innovation, advancing new industrialization and fostering high-quality development," said Li Xianjun, an associate researcher at the Institute of Industrial Economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

He said the country's emphasis on the real economy and the development of advanced manufacturing through intelligent digital technologies will help make China's economy more resilient, strengthen the capacity to buffer against external risks and shocks and build the country into a manufacturing powerhouse.

More efforts should be made to achieve greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology, and tackle bottleneck issues in core technologies in fields like basic materials and software, precision components, integrated circuits and high-end equipment, Li Xianjun said.

China's manufacturing sector has maintained growth momentum amid challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic and a complicated external environment.

Data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology showed that China accounted for nearly 30 percent of global manufacturing output in 2021, up from 22.5 percent in 2012.

Pan Helin, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School, underlined the significance of stepping up support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and further optimizing the business environment, given that enterprises have played a prominent part in driving technological innovation.

It is important to push the manufacturing sector toward the higher-end, smarter and greener production, Pan said, emphasizing talent is key to promoting high-quality development of manufacturing.

Chinese tech companies should strive harder to achieve breakthroughs in key, core and cutting-edge technologies by investing more in basic research and strategic, forward-looking fields to safeguard the stability and safety of industrial chains, he said.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, China's industrial output, a key economic indicator, rose 3.6 percent year-on-year in 2022, as the country's industrial production continued to rebound steadily. Notably, the output of high-tech manufacturing and equipment manufacturing segments soared 7.4 percent and 5.6 percent year-on-year, respectively, last year.

"The high-tech manufacturing segment has become an important driver of China's high-quality economic development," said Li Dongsheng, founder and chairman of consumer electronics maker TCL Technology Group Corp in an earlier interview, adding promoting technological innovation and increasing capital input are crucial for the growth of the high-tech manufacturing segment.

China's manufacturers should transition from exporting products to exporting industrial capacities, ramp up localized operations abroad and avoid trade barriers to enhance their global competitiveness, he said.

The high-quality development of China's manufacturing sector has entered a fast lane, buoyed by digital technologies like cloud computing, big data, the internet of things and blockchain, said Zhou Yunjie, chairman and CEO of Chinese home appliance giant Haier Group.

Tunneling for development

Construction workers prepare a tunneling machine for an urban railway project in Hefei, Anhui province, in a recent operation. According to State contractor China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp Ltd, a unit of China Railway Construction Corp, the provincial capital's metro network, which has been labeled by the local government as an infrastructure project key to local livelihoods, is now 171 kilometers long, with 133 stations having opened to passengers already. China Railway 24th Bureau recently finished major tunneling work on a rail section of the Line 6 of the Hefei Metro project, its officials said. YUAN BING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Yu Chengdong, CEO of Huawei's device business group, introduces Huawei's latest products in Shanghai on Thursday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Huawei smartphone biz springs back to life with a string of new products

By MA SI
masi@chinadaily.com.cn

Huawei Technologies Co unveiled a string of new smartphones on Thursday, quieting rumors that it is considering selling off its handset business, thus showcasing the company's resilience amid US government restrictions.

Its latest foldable smartphone Mate X3 and the new flagship phone P60 series are part of a broader push by Huawei to grow its smartphone business, which is showing encouraging signs of revival despite the lingering restrictions.

Yu Chengdong, CEO of Huawei's device business group, said at a product launch event in Shanghai: "We have experienced four years of winter under sanctions. Now, the spring has come and we are excited about the future."

Yu said the Shenzhen, Guangdong province-based company has continued heavy investment into research and development, which has enabled Huawei to unveil cutting-edge technologies even amid grave challenges related to the ban.

Last year, Huawei's R&D spending hit $23.8 billion, and the company said as its profits increase in the coming years, it will continue increasing investment in exploration of frontier technologies.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance, a telecom industry association, said ever since the US government placed tough restrictions on Huawei in 2019, the company has been working hard to reduce the negative impact on its revenues. And now, it is starting to bounce back.

Market research firm Counterpoint Research said that in the fourth quarter last year, Huawei's sales volume of smartphones bottomed out, achieving a year-on-year growth of 15 percent, and its domestic market share has climbed to 9.5 percent, up from 7 percent a year earlier.

The rise came as sales volume in the overall Chinese smartphone market declined by 15 percent year-on-year during the same time frame.

Ren Zhengfei, founder of Huawei, recently said the company has replaced more than 13,000 components that had been affected by the US restrictions with parts developed either in-house or by other Chinese companies over the past three years.

Ren said more than 4,000 circuit boards have also been replaced, and the company's circuit boards have not stabilized until recently with qualified domestic components.

He added that the company has developed its own management system software — MetaERP — entirely using its own proprietary operating system and database.

MetaERP has passed the practical test of application in Huawei's various departments around the world and the annual settlement test of the company's ledger.

On the ChatGPT boom, Ren said that in the future there will be ups and downs in AI large-language model industry.

ChatGPT is an AI chatbot developed by US-based AI research company OpenAI.

Ren said the direct contribution of AI software platform companies to human society may be less than 2 percent, and 98 percent of their contribution will be related to promoting the development of industrial and agricultural modalities and systems.

The popularization of AI services requires 5G connectivity, and Huawei can only build the underlying computing platform of AI, and will not touch the application platform, Ren said.

What are the opportunities of ChatGPT for Huawei? Ren said it will boost demand for computing and pipeline data flow, and Huawei's relevant products will have more market demand.

Evergrande plan lifts property hopes

By WANG YING in Shanghai
wang_ying@chinadaily.com.cn

Debt-laden property developer China Evergrande Group has announced plans for restructuring around $20 billion in offshore debt, an important move for the group to resume normal operations and that also could be seen as a model for other struggling developers, industry experts said.

Market observers said this swap is an important move for Evergrande to resume normal operations, and could encourage other debt-stricken property players to consider similar moves, potentially improving the entire industry's health.

Evergrande and its main creditors made progress by entering into binding agreements with bondholders for $19.15 billion of notes the company had previously issued, Evergrande said in a statement late on Wednesday.

Evergrande gave creditors a basket of options to swap their debt for new bonds and equity-linked instruments backed by the group and its two Hong Kong-listed companies, Evergrande Property Services Group and Evergrande New Energy Vehicle Group.

It is expected a series of restructuring agreements will be reached with different groups of bondholders by March 31, before the restructuring starts on Oct 1, the developer said.

"It is hoped that the proposed restructuring will alleviate the company's pressure of offshore indebtedness and facilitate the company's efforts to resume operations in order to resolve issues onshore," said Evergrande in a filing.

Yan Yuejin, director of the Shanghai-based E-house China Research and Development Institution, said, "The disclosure of Evergrande's offshore debt restructuring plan means the group's overall debt restructuring is making progress against the background that the property sector identified its main task as preventing and mitigating risks."

The plan will not only win more time for the group's debt disposition but allow Evergrande to focus on the delivery of residential projects in the coming three years, as the developer is striving to maintain normal operations of business and construction, Yan said.

Although the long-awaited proposals could provide breathing space for the developer, "it's too early to say the balance sheet of Evergrande could recover fully", said Li Yujia, chief researcher at the Guangdong Planning Institute's residential policy research center.

With more than $300 billion in total liabilities, including offshore debt, Evergrande has been at the center of a property debt crisis in which multiple Chinese developers defaulted over the past year, forcing many to enter debt restructuring talks, according to a Reuters report.

Industry experts suggested the settlement of Evergrande's debt crisis will set a template for other indebted enterprises in the real estate sector, and the Chinese property market as a whole.

"It's good to see Evergrande seek solutions to the debt problem in a market framework and under the rule of law, instead of using administrative interference," said Li.

Since its debt problem started to deteriorate in the second half of 2021, at least 20 months had passed before Evergrande came up with a clear debt restructuring plan, showing the complexity of the debt crisis and the large amount of capital involved, said Yan.

"In fact, with the gradual improvement of the property market this year, the sector is also seeing improved market confidence, both of which will have a positive impact on debt issues faced by the likes of Evergrandes," said Yan.

Evergrande New Energy Vehicle Group said in a separate statement on Thursday it may have to halt production of electric vehicles if it does not get fresh funding, after delivering more than 900 units of its flagship Hengchi 5 model.

The EV manufacturing unit of the embattled property developer said it was aiming to cut costs through measures such as reducing staff numbers and improving management efficiency.

"If we are unable to obtain additional liquidity, the group may be at risk of discontinuing production," it said.

The firm could, however, obtain financing of more than 29 billion yuan ($4.2 billion) "in the future" as a number of flagship models are expected to enter the mass production stage, it said in its statement.

The NEV unit is key for the transformation plans of Evergrande, once China's top-selling property developer and now at the center of a deepening debt crisis.

China vows green future for oil and gas works

By ZHENG XIN
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China has vowed to vigorously promote the integrated growth of oil and gas exploration and development with new energy, while actively expanding the scale of green electricity utilization by oil and gas enterprises.

By 2025, cumulative crude oil production will increase by more than 2 million metric tons through enhanced oil recovery methods, according to an action plan to accelerate integrated development of oil and gas exploration and development with new energy resources, released by the National Energy Administration recently.

The enhanced oil recovery methods include air injection, carbon dioxide injection and electric heating assistance for heavy oil thermal recovery — and all these methods will be supported by low-cost green power, it said.

Enhanced oil recovery, also known as tertiary recovery, is the third stage used to extract oil from an oil reserve. While more costly and expensive compared with the primary and secondary recovery stages, it can extract more of a reserve's oil compared with primary and secondary recoveries.

The administration also aims to further accelerate the development and utilization of geothermal, wind and solar energy resources related to oil and gas fields, while actively promoting an environmentally friendly, energy-saving, emission-reducing and multi-energy integrated oil and gas production system and striving to build "low-carbon" and "zero-carbon" oil and gas fields, it said.

An analyst said China's mature oil-producing regions have gradually entered the late stage of development, facing difficulties such as insufficient replacement of oil and gas resources, difficulties in maintaining stable production and high production costs.

It is necessary to strengthen the development and utilization of new energy and promote the transformation and development of traditional oil and gas production into comprehensive energy development and utilization and a new materials manufacturing base, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

According to the administration, China's economy has been growing steadily, with energy demand expected to continue increasing. It is therefore necessary to ensure sufficient oil and gas supplies while accelerating the industry's green and low-carbon transformation at the same time.

Efficient development and utilization of new energy will help meet demand from increased power demand for the electrification of oil and gas fields, it said.

Briefly

Tencent reports rising revenues, net profits

Chinese internet giant Tencent has reported year-on-year increases in its revenue and net profit for the fourth quarter of 2022, despite drops in its annual earnings. Tencent raked in 145 billion yuan ($21 billion) in revenue in the quarter to Dec 31, up 0.5 percent year-on-year. Its net profit rose by 19 percent year-on-year to 29.7 billion yuan in the fourth quarter.

Hebei Jan-Feb foreign trade grows 8%

North China's Hebei province saw its foreign trade grow 8 percent year-on-year to 86.67 billion yuan ($12.6 billion) in the first two months of this year, according to local Customs. Its exports totaled 48.44 billion yuan, up 3.6 percent year-on-year, while imports hit 38.23 billion yuan, up 14.4 percent, data from Shijiazhuang Customs showed.

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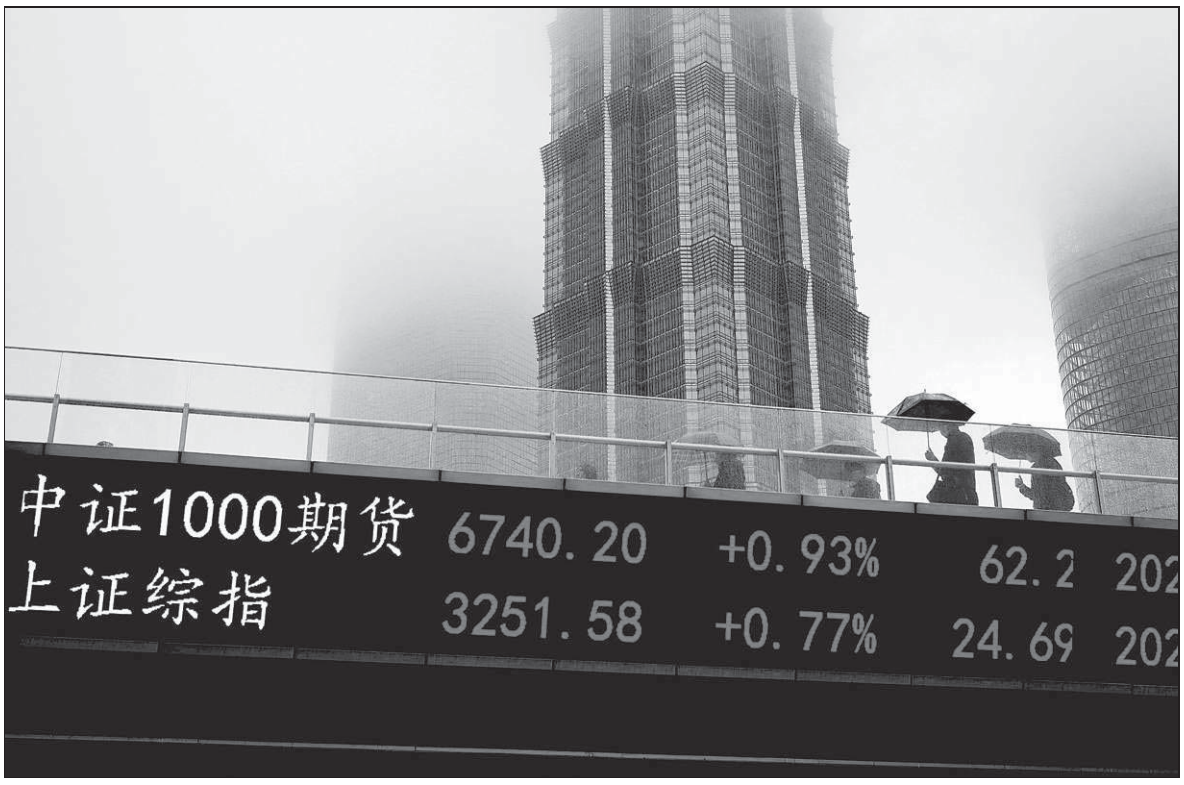
BUSINESS



Pedestrians walk in Shanghai on an overpass with a board showing stock indexes on March 17. REUTERS

Registration-based IPO a boon for smaller banks

Lenders boasting various advantages expected to make up main float force

By JIANG XUEQING
jiangxueqing@chinadaily.com.cn

With the full implementation of the registration-based initial public offering system in the A-share market, the number of listed banks in China is expected to increase significantly and IPOs may speed up for small and medium-sized banks, experts said.

China is gradually advancing the transfer of IPO applications of candidates, which refer to companies in the process of examination and approval for listings on the main boards of the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges, from China's securities regulator to the bourses.

As of Monday, 10 of 11 small and medium-sized banks lining up for IPOs on the main boards of the two stock exchanges appeared on the list of companies being reviewed by the bourses.

China has officially rolled out its across-the-board registration-based IPO system with relevant rules coming into effect on Feb 17, according to the China Securities Regulatory Commission.

Under the new system, the listing review process is more convenient, which is more favorable for banks with excellent performance, and has obvious business advantages and unique development potential, experts said.

Liao Zhiming, chief banking analyst at China Merchants Securities Co, said after the country fully implemented the registration-based IPO system, the number of listed banks is expected to increase significantly and IPOs may accelerate for small and medium-sized banks.

As the difficulty of listing will be reduced, small and medium-sized banks should proactively improve information disclosure and regulate financial management in accordance with the requirements of the registration-based IPO system, in order to go public as soon as possible, Liao said.

Among the small and medium-sized banks, those with obvious localization advantages, clear development strategies, sound equity structures and strong digital genes will become the main force in going public, said Yang Haiping, a researcher with the Institute of Securities and Futures of the Central University of Finance and Economics.

Experts believe that the registration-based IPO system is indeed a boon to many small and medium-sized banks with the aim of replenishing capital through IPOs.

Zeng Gang, director of the Shanghai Institution for Finance & Development, said going public can broaden the capital replenishment channels of small and medium-sized banks and improve their capital adequacy ratios. It can also enhance banks' brand influence, thus improving their competitiveness.

In recent years, the capital replenishment needs of small and medium-sized banks have become urgent. As of the end of the fourth quarter last year, the capital adequacy ratio of China's city commercial banks was 12.61 percent, down by 0.47 percentage points year-on-year. During the same period, the CAR of rural commercial banks in the country dropped by 0.19 percentage points to 12.37 percent, according to the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission.

The main problem currently faced by many small and medium-sized banks is the need to replenish core Tier 1 capital. Under the pressure, IPOs are an optional solution for these banks, said Wang Yifeng, chief analyst of the financial sector at Everbright Securities.

In addition, introducing strategic investors during the IPO process can further promote shareholder diversification and better corporate governance of banks, thereby preventing financial risks, said Lou Feipeng, a senior economist at Postal Savings Bank of China.

The China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission said at a meeting on March 13 that various risks and hidden dangers should be dealt with promptly, and the reform of small and medium-sized financial institutions should be deepened to continuously strengthen the security system, ensuring financial stability and holding fast to the bottom line of no systemic financial risks.

Bank loan quality will remain divergent in China over the next 12 to 18 months. Regional banks, including city and rural commercial banks, remain vulnerable to further deterioration in asset quality because of less diversified loan portfolios and higher exposure to weaker borrowers, said a report by Moody's Investors Service on March 15.

The government will remain keen on maintaining financial stability because of indications that security considerations, including banking system risk prevention, will feature more prominently in economic policymaking than before, Moody's said.

ChatGPT fever sparks plans for better alternatives in China

By CHENG YU
chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

As the Microsoft-backed ChatGPT takes the tech world by storm, Kai-Fu Lee, former head of Google China and CEO of Chinese investment firm Sinovation Ventures, has become the latest Chinese tech leader to jump on the bandwagon with plans to develop an alternative that goes far beyond "a Chinese version of ChatGPT".

The alternative, called Project AI 2.0, will be built into a global tech firm that features AI 2.0 platforms and productivity applications. AI 2.0, according to Lee, will not be a high-performance chat tool, nor utilize AI-generated graphics and texts, but will ultimately reduce costs to almost zero.

Lee and other veteran investors and industry experts believe that Chinese companies have great opportunities in the application of ChatGPT-related technologies, but a big gap with the United States exists.

"Chinese platforms will have great opportunities. Although they might not be as technologically advanced as the US, I believe the Chinese market and Chinese companies will win," he said in an interview with China Daily.

"AI is providing opportunities to companies that are 10 times bigger than those of the mobile internet era and they are accessible to Chinese participants for the first time," he added.

Since January, an array of Chinese platform and tech companies, including Alibaba Group Holding, iFlytek and NetEase, have rushed to unveil ChatGPT-related efforts. Tencent Holdings President Martin Lau said during a media call on Wednesday that the company would invest resources into building foundational AI models and gradually roll out its own version.

Meituan Co-Founder Wang Huiwen said in a note on Tuesday that his newly established AI startup Guangnian Zhiwei, which aims to develop an alternative to ChatGPT, has kicked off A-round financing and has already partnered with two other co-founders.

"Platform capability is very important," Lee emphasized, adding that every field can rewrite its existing apps to create a more profitable model.

The veteran investor sees three phases of AI application development. The first phase of popular AI apps is more likely to appear in content, where the margin for error is more tolerable, while the second phase is that AI would be used in fields like finance and education for assistance in automatic trading and language teaching. AI will be capable wherever it is needed in the third phase.

Ren Bobing, executive director of Sinovation Ventures, said that Chinese startups have great advantages in product innovation but still have a gap with the US in key AI drivers like computing power.

Yin Qi, co-founder and CEO of Chinese AI company Megvii, agreed, saying that the US does have a larger amount of funds for pure technological innovation and long-term investment, while Chinese AI companies still face the pressure of short-term commercialization.

Zhou Ming, founder and CEO of Longboat, a Chinese provider of large language models, also noted that GPU resources and labor costs need to be considered if Chinese startups want to develop ChatGPT-like models and solutions.

"It is not suitable for Chinese startups to chase large models and burn money. It is more affordable for them to spend several tens of millions of yuan to train a model and then offer personalized services for customers," Zhou said.

"For Chinese companies to do related AI business, trying to surpass OpenAI in an all-around way is not recommended for now, but explore a niche market and do it step-by-step," he added.

A step further

Builders from China Railway No 4 Engineering Group Co Ltd dig through the New Dajinshan Tunnel on the 76-kilometer Chaohu-Maanshan High-speed Railway on Tuesday. The railway is scheduled to be operational in 2026 and link the two cities in Anhui province, helping to boost development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt. LIU ZHIXU / FOR CHINA DAILY

HOW MUCH DOES A DROP OF WATER MEAN TO AQUATIC LIFE?

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LI DONGHANG AND MA XUEJING / FOR CHINA DAILY

BUSINESSFOCUS

Online retailers expanding global footprint

Cross-border e-commerce seen as path to diversify revenue sources, boost foreign trade

By FAN FEIFEI
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese online retailers are ratcheting up efforts to expand their global footprint amid a broader drive to cultivate new users and diversify revenue sources, industry experts said. This comes as an increasing number of Chinese vendors sell their products globally through cross-border e-commerce platforms, they said.

As a new form of foreign trade, cross-border e-commerce has been growing exponentially. It has become an important driving force for stabilizing China's foreign trade, particularly in the past three years as the COVID-19 pandemic impeded business travel and face-to-face meetings, the experts added.

Online discounter PDD Holdings, parent company of Chinese e-commerce platform Pinduoduo, recently announced that the company would roll out its cross-border e-commerce platform Temu in Australia and New Zealand in March to help Chinese manufacturers boost their global reach.

Chinese-made products sold on Temu in North America will also be available for Australian shoppers, the company said. To attract domestic merchants, Temu will offer a series of preferential policies like an exemption from deposits and commission fees.

The company will provide infrastructure services, including warehousing, cross-border logistics and after-sales services for Chinese manufacturers that expand their presence in overseas markets, PDD Holdings said. Other services such as language assistance, product standards, intellectual property rights protection and legal aid will also be offered.

Temu, launched in the United States in September, has gained popularity among consumers there as it offers a wide selection of merchandise, including apparel, consumer electronics, jewelry, shoes, bags, cosmetics, baby products and pet supplies at competitive prices, the company said.

Temu said it offers deep discounts and coupons as part of its strategy to serve price-conscious consumers, including a wireless headset for $8.99, an electronic dental irrigator for $11.50 and a skirt for $5. Consumers in the US haven't seen prices this low for a long time, it said, and most of its offerings are shipped directly from factories or warehouses in China.

Last month, Temu made a splash at the *Super Bowl*, the most-watched television event in the US, with a 30-second advertisement titled *Shop Like a Billionaire*.

As of Jan 31, Temu had been downloaded nearly 20 million times globally, with shoppers from North America accounting for more than 90 percent of the total, according to US-based mobile app analytics company Sensor Tower.

Experts said Temu's business model removes middlemen from the equation, allowing Chinese suppliers to sell directly to US consumers and ship directly from China, instead of building a network of US warehouses.

In September, Pinduoduo announced plans to invest 10 billion yuan ($1.47 billion) to help China's manufacturing enterprises widen their global reach. The first phase of the initiative will help 100 Chinese brands go global and also assist 10,000 manufacturers in connecting directly with overseas markets.

"We will learn from successful domestic experience and increase investments in scientific research and technology to better serve the overseas business operations of Chinese manufacturers," Chen Lei, chairman and CEO of Pinduoduo, said in a previous interview.

Chen emphasized that the company's cross-border e-commerce business will not simply repeat what others have already done, but will instead strive to create its own unique value.

The combined size of imports and exports of the country's cross-border e-commerce segment reached 2.11 trillion yuan in 2022, up 9.8 percent year-on-year, the General Administration of Customs said. E-commerce exports alone reached 1.55 trillion yuan in the same year, up nearly 12 percent.

Zhang Zhouping, a senior analyst of business-to-business and cross-border activities at the Internet Economy Institute, a domestic consultancy, said Chinese e-commerce platforms are accelerating their expansion in overseas markets to seek new sources of revenue given the slowing growth in domestic e-commerce.

Temu, however, still faces intense competition from established players such as Amazon in the US market, Zhang said. "Chinese fast-fashion online retailer Shein and AliExpress, Alibaba Group's cross-border e-commerce platform, both of which have already established a significant presence in overseas markets like the US, will also face stiff competition," Zhang added.

Cross-border e-commerce has emerged as a key way to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on foreign trade, Zhang said. It is also playing a crucial part in encouraging traditional foreign trade enterprises to build new brands.

"Price, quality and service are the most important factors consumers consider when buying products. Low prices have shown some obvious advantages, especially amid global economic downward pressures," Zhang said, while underscoring the significance of ensuring the stability of supply chains and compliance with local laws and regulations.

Fashion retailer Shein is expanding its facilities in the US, one of the company's key markets, with plans to open two more distribution centers. That could help shorten delivery times to its customers by three to four days, said George Chiao, president of Shein's US operations, according to a report in The Wall Street Journal.

The company opened its first distribution center in Whitestown, Indiana, in April. The additional warehouses will greatly improve delivery efficiency, given that it now takes 10 to 15 days for Shein customers to receive their orders. Shein will also hire hundreds of more employees in the US, the report said.

Shein, known for its low prices and a large selection of fashionable clothing and accessories, surpassed Amazon in app downloads on US mobile platforms for the first time in the second quarter of last year, according to Sensor Tower.

Shein announced in November that it had opened a new office and the company's first distribution facility in Canada. "Our new facility will help us cut shipping times for Canadian customers and reduce the number of packages in the international shipping stream," said Vito Zhong, general manager of Shein Canada.

With the opening of the new facility, Shein Canada plans to add approximately 200 new corporate and warehouse jobs by the end of 2023.

Overseas consumers have gradually boosted their awareness of, and trust in, Chinese companies and products, and maintain a favorable attitude toward Chinese brands, according to a white paper released by online media outlets Sina News and Huanqiu.com.

According to US-based research firm eMarketer, worldwide e-commerce sales are expected to reach $7.39 trillion by 2025, with the penetration rate of e-commerce rising to 23.6 percent in the retail sector across the globe.

China is accelerating steps to boost the development of new forms and models of foreign trade. The Ministry of Commerce said it will work with other departments to introduce measures to support logistics enterprises, cross-border e-commerce platforms and vendors in the building of overseas warehouses.

Chen Tao, an analyst with internet consultancy Analysys in Beijing, said the e-commerce penetration rate in North America is high, and local consumers are willing to buy products using online marketplaces.

Chen called for Chinese enterprises to accelerate localization efforts in overseas markets and pay attention to compliance with local laws and regulations to ensure their brands become reputable.

Chinese tech heavyweight Alibaba Group has also launched Miravia, a new e-commerce platform in Spain, to occupy a bigger share of the midrange to high-end market there.

Miravia is operated independently, and products sold on the platform are mainly from Spanish and other European brands in a wide range of categories, including beauty, fashion, personal care, electronics, foods and infant and healthcare products, Alibaba said.

Miravia, AliExpress and Lazada are three independent business segments under Alibaba. Lazada focuses on the e-commerce market in Southeast Asia, while AliExpress concentrates on cross-border online shopping.

"Spain is one of the European markets with the greatest potential in the e-commerce sector. It has a high penetration of internet and mobile technology, which provides huge potential for a mobile-driven platform like Miravia," said Yann Fontaine, CEO of Miravia.

"We hope to cover all the needs of Spanish consumers while offering local and international brands greater tools to sell and engage with their customers," Fontaine said. The platform also offers new users promotions such as first-order discounts and free delivery of goods exceeding 10 euros ($10.92).

"Chinese companies should make full use of cross-border e-commerce platforms to quickly capture the demand in overseas markets, learn more about relevant laws, regulations and quality standards in these countries, and adjust supply chains to make products that meet local requirements," said Cui Lili, director of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics' Institute of E-commerce.

Above: Customers shop at a Shein showroom in Tokyo, Japan, in November 2022. The Chinese fast fashion retailer is expanding its presence in the global market.
NORIKO HAYASHI / BLOOMBERG

Right: A consumer compares product prices between Temu, an online cross-border marketplace of PDD Holdings, and popular fashion retailer Shein in October.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

More shoppers go electronic for bountiful offerings, high-quality goods worldwide

By FAN FEIFEI

Feng Ziyue, a 31-year-old senior high school teacher in Beijing, usually takes a pass on brick-and-mortar shopping, instead preferring to scroll through websites and apps to find fresh produce, alcoholic beverages, cosmetics and apparel.

Chilean cherries, Norwegian salmon, New Zealand milk, French red wine and eye shadow and moisturizer from Japan arrive in fine shape at her door in just a few days.

"When I was studying abroad, I often bought cosmetics, handbags and electronic devices for my friends back home. After moving back, I found cross-border online shopping very convenient and discounts often available," Feng said.

Feng is among the growing number of Chinese shoppers who are embracing online shopping for high-quality, imported and foreign-brand items. This has become a significant driver for consumers to become more accustomed to spending money on high-quality goods, industry experts said.

People between 26 and 35 make up the demographic that most frequently purchases imports and foreign brands, accounting for nearly half of the total of all age groups, according to a report from the Consumption and Industry Development Research Institute of Chinese e-commerce platform JD.

Smartphones, computers, maternal and infant products, beauty and skincare items and home appliances are the categories most favored by Chinese consumers among all imported products, the report said.

Moreover, the top five countries for imported products are the United States, Japan, France, Germany and Switzerland. Generation Z consumers, those born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s, favor watches, eyeglasses, jewelry and digital products from international brands, whereas senior shoppers prefer food, clothing and alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages, it added.

Liu Hui, director of JD's Consumption and Industry Development Research Institute, said overseas brands should pay more attention to smaller cities, speed up digital transformation and design and launch diverse products to better meet consumers' diverse needs.

The transaction volume of more than 1,100 overseas brands on JD Worldwide, JD's imported product platform, more than doubled year-on-year during last year's Singles Day shopping event.

Sales of imported digital products and home appliances surged dramatically, with computer sales up fivefold, camera products rising by 158 percent and gaming equipment up 125 percent compared with the previous year.

China has been optimizing the list of imported retail goods for cross-border e-commerce. Last year, 29 product categories with strong demand from consumers, including ski equipment, dishwashers and tomato juice, were added to the list, according to a statement jointly issued by the Ministry of Finance and seven other central government departments.

"Young Chinese consumers, especially Gen Z, use independent thinking and judgment when choosing brands, and they prefer to pursue niche lifestyles and personalized products," said Li Yanchuan, head of Amazon China Global Store and Prime. For instance, virtual reality equipment, camping gear and ski supplies have been increasingly favored by Chinese shoppers.

Li said the "stay-at-home economy" has created more shopping opportunities and needs, and shopping for healthy, quality-of-life products has become the new normal. Beauty, personal care and clothing have been the most popular categories among consumers in cross-border online shopping, he added.

Although orders using that type of shopping are mainly from first-tier cities, residents living in smaller cities have shown rapidly growing purchasing power, Li said, adding that the company will further enrich its cross-border shopping offerings based on consumers who share similar interests and hobbies.

"With the expansion of domestic demand and advances in emerging retail technologies, China has introduced preferential policies, such as lowering import taxes and expanding the range of goods allowed to be imported," said Zhang Tianbing, head of Deloitte Asia-Pacific consumer products and retail industry.

The boom in celebrity livestreaming has spurred cross-border e-commerce purchases by domestic consumers, Zhang said, adding that overseas brands are moving to cross-border platforms as they expand their distribution channels in light of COVID-19 disruptions to offline retail.

"The penetration rate of cross-border e-commerce in lower-tier cities and townships has been increasing in the past few years. Chinese consumers are demonstrating rising demand for diversified, personalized and niche products from abroad," said Chen Tao, an analyst with internet consultancy Analysys in Beijing.

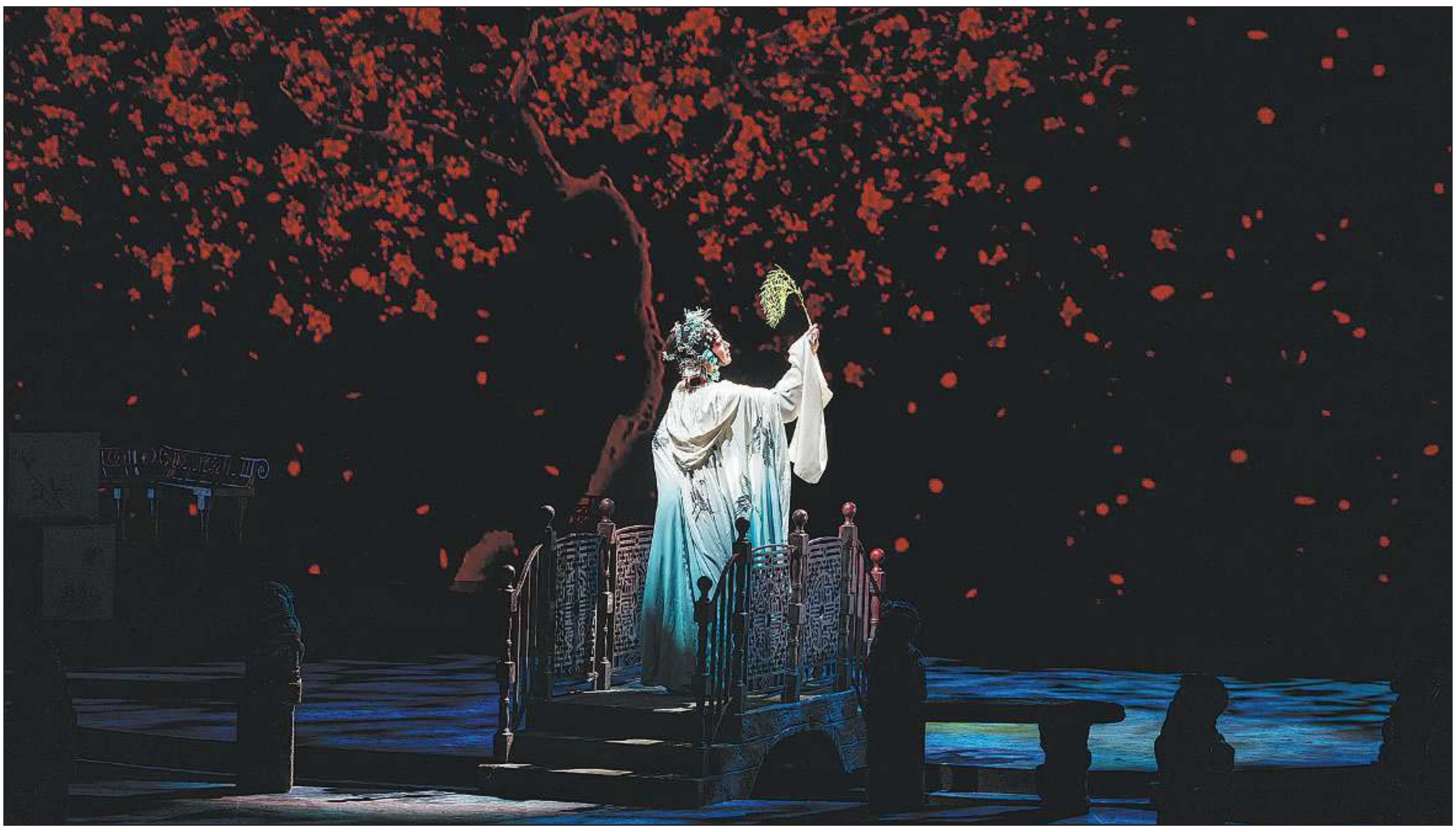
He added that online shopping via livestreaming videos — an easy way for domestic consumers to find detailed information on overseas products — is very popular among the post-80s and post-90s generations of consumers.

Visitors check out Chinese e-commerce platform JD's international logistics system during a trade expo in Fuzhou, Fujian province, in June. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Classic play gets act together

Full 55-act version of *The Peony Pavilion* hits the world on nationwide tour, **Chen Nan** reports.



Top and above left: A full-length version of *The Peony Pavilion* by Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe is touring nationwide. With 55 acts in total, the new production allows the audience to develop a full understanding of *The Peony Pavilion* and its Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) playwright Tang Xianzu. **Above right:** Kunqu Opera actresses Luo Chenxue (left) and Hu Weilu play the lead roles. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

One of the most-performed Kunqu Opera plays by Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) playwright Tang Xianzu is *The Peony Pavilion*. Some of its most famous acts, such as *Walking in the Garden* and *The Dream Interrupted*, are frequently staged by Kunqu Opera troupes in China because of their beautiful singing, poetic lyrics and graceful dances, which lend them popular appeal to audiences of various ages.

Traditionally, the play is shown only in parts due to its long length, but last year, the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe staged all 55 acts of the play in an eight-hour, three-part marathon. This full-length version of *The Peony Pavilion* has been touring around the country ever since, with 12 performances in 18 days.

From March 8 to 10, it was staged at the China National Opera House in Beijing, the first time that the total 55-act performance was given in the capital.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Kunqu Opera performers to perform all the 55 acts of the classic work. It's also a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the audience to watch *The Peony Pavilion* in its near-entirety," says director Guo Xiaonan.

According to Guo, who rearranged Tang's script based on an adaptation by the late playwright Wang Renjie, the original plan was to stage the eight-hour-long production in one day, but the company decided to present it on three consecutive nights.

"A total of 55 acts allow the audience to develop a full understanding of *The Peony Pavilion* and what Tang was trying to express," says Guo.

He also points to the play's historical value. "Besides the romance between Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei, there is detailed information in the work reflecting the culture, society, religion, costumes and other aspects of life during the Ming Dynasty," he says.

The staging of the production appeals to a contemporary audience as well as enthusiasts of history. The set is a large, revolving turntable displaying different acts on all four sides, which allows for viewers to experience the story out of order.

The Peony Pavilion is about Du, a beautiful young woman, who falls in love with Liu, a handsome scholar, whom she meets in a dream. She wakes up and finds that her longing for this man is so strong that it gradually causes her to fall ill and die. After her death, she persuades a judge in the underworld to grant her permission to return as a ghost to find him. She eventually finds the man, who is staying at the temple where she is buried. They have a passionate love affair and wish to marry. When he opens Du's coffin, his love for her is so powerful that it brings her back to life, and they live happily ever after.

"I have read the script over and over again. I wrote notes on it and my notes are over 50,000 words long," says Guo.

There are more than 300 types of traditional Chinese operas, which are still performed in the country.

Guo has directed plays in over 50 of the types, including Peking Opera, Yuju and Lyuju operas.

"This 55-act production of *The Peony Pavilion* is a precious opportunity and an ultimate dream for me," Guo says.

Inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO, Kunqu Opera, one of the oldest traditional Chinese operas, has a history of over 600 years and originated in Kunshan, East China's Jiangsu province. With a combination of singing, dancing and acting, as well as the accompaniment of a live band, it is performed in the melodic Suzhou dialect.

In 1999, Guo directed a 35-act version of *The Peony Pavilion*, working with established Kunqu Opera performers of the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe, such as Cai Zhengren, Yue Meiti and Zhang Jingxian.

For the latest version, Guo worked with the younger generation of the company's Kunqu Opera performers — all are in their 20s and 30s.

"For Kunqu Opera performers, *The Peony Pavilion* is a required course of study," says Luo Chenxue, who plays the role of Du. "I've played the role of Du since I started to learn Kunqu Opera as a child, but I had never performed all 55 acts, which was challenging and eye-opening.

"This new production not only portrays Du as a beautiful woman, who desires love and freedom, but also as a person of strength, who is persistent and fights for love.

> I've played the role of Du since I started to learn Kunqu Opera as a child, but I had never performed all 55 acts, which was challenging and eye-opening."
>
> **Luo Chenxue,** Kunqu Opera performer

"After she returns to life, she faces judgment from society and even her own family. She shows considerable bravery in the face of this. These aspects of her character are rarely seen by audiences because the parts are rarely staged," Luo says.

Hu Weilu plays the role of Liu. As a female Kunqu Opera performer, Hu received training in taking on young male roles.

According to Guo, such cross-gender performances have a long tradition in the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe, which has a history of 45 years.

"Cross-gender performances display a unique aesthetic of traditional Chinese operas," Guo says.

In the past, most traditional opera performers were male, so the practice of cross-gender performance was common, as some had to perform female roles.

In modern times, the tradition of cross-gender performances has remained, now moving in both directions.

"It's a bold move to let this young actress, Hu, play the leading role of the male protagonist in the 55 acts of *The Peony Pavilion*," says Guo.

Hu rehearsed for eight months in Shanghai last year with the rest of the team to prepare for the role. "I am a naturally quiet and reserved person, but in these acts, I had to open up myself for many scenes, for example in the sections where Liu shows his passionate love for Du," she says.

The company has staged more than 10 versions of *The Peony Pavilion*, according to Gu Haohao, director of the company. "Those versions trained and inspired many young Kunqu Opera performers, as well as building up a large fan base for the ancient art form," Gu says.

"The 55-act version of *The Peony Pavilion* is the result of multiple contributions from many of the company's artists, young and old, who brought this classic work alive."

After its Beijing stop, the production will be staged in other Chinese cities, such as Zhengzhou, Henan province, and Weifang, Shandong province.

Contact the writer at chennan@chinadaily.com.cn

Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

HK scientist dedicated to research sees formula for progress

HONG KONG — For Wai Ping-kong, a Hong Kong physicist specializing in optical communications, a worthwhile research topic must be forward-looking.

"You have to identify where the future lies, and then go bravely toward that direction," says Wai, now the president of Hong Kong Baptist University.

Wai is a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. His proposal to the conference focuses on the better utilization of artificial intelligence in China's research and education.

"The next generation has to pick up emerging technological tools," Wai says.

The 63-year-old has kept a forward-looking mindset, not only in academic research, but also when making life decisions.

"I have always believed in the development of the nation and it turns out that I'm right," Wai says.

Wai grew up as a child passionate about natural phenomena. In the late 1970s, when applying to university, Wai decided to study natural science while most of his peers with good grades would choose medicine.

At the time, science and technology education was relatively undervalued in Hong Kong. According to Wai, there were just around 30 faculty positions in physics in the only two universities in Hong Kong, which had a population of around 5 million people back then. "People said I wouldn't find a job after graduation," Wai recalls.

In 1996, with the impending handover of Hong Kong back to the motherland, Wai returned from the United States after earning his doctoral degree and working there for several years.

Wai Ping-kong, president of Hong Kong Baptist University, is a physicist. CHEN DUO / XINHUA

"I thought the future was in Hong Kong, and I felt Chinese scientists would have better opportunities on our own land," Wai says.

At the turn of the 21st century, higher education in Hong Kong developed rapidly and more universities came into being. Wai joined the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and spent 25 years there, teaching, conducting researching and later taking part in school management.

Being the dean of the Faculty of Engineering and then vice-president of the university, Wai worked to vigorously expand opportunities for scientific research at the polytechnic university. He saw a future in tapping into the science and technology development of the nation and helped researchers of the university build partnerships with various institutions in the Chinese mainland.

Wai once played a leading role in facilitating the cooperation between a research team led by Yung Kai-leung, a professor of the polytechnic university in precision engineering, and the China Academy of Space Technology.

Since 2010, Wai's university has been contributing to the nation's space projects and is by far the only tertiary education institution in Hong Kong with experience in international space missions.

After more than two decades at the university, Wai transferred to the Hong Kong Baptist University, a university known for its humanities and fine arts education, and was appointed as the president.

"Cultural soft power is just as important as hard science for national development," says Wai.

He says that stories about the deep and profound Chinese culture and the Chinese path to modernization are worth sharing with the world, noting that the humanities and arts disciplines have an edge in telling those stories.

Working with his colleagues, Wai has been busy promoting the application of digital tools in humanities and arts education.

From Wai's perspective, Hong Kong is a highly international city, and young people in Hong Kong have an advantage in telling the China story to the world.

"This is an opportunity that national development brings to Hong Kong's youth," Wai says.

XINHUA

LIFESHANGHAI

Tong Jun's watercolor painting of the Arena of Verona in Italy.

Paintings of Salzburg's streets (above) in Austria and the towers of Charles Bridge (right) in Prague, Czech Republic.

A photo from the 1930s shows Tong Jun (right) and Yang Tingbao in Suzhou, Jiangsu province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The Georgentor in Dresden, Germany, as drawn by Tong Jun.

Paintings feature St. Boniface Catholic Church (left) in Frankfurt, Germany, and the Market Square (above) in Rothenburg, Germany.

A CAREER BY DESIGN

Exhibition shines spotlight on low-profile Tong Jun's key contribution to the architectural community, **Zhang Kun** reports.

A two-part exhibition at Shanghai's Jiushi Art Museum and the Jiushi Art Salon is the first public showcase of the life and works of Tong Jun, a pioneer of architectural studies in China.

"In the academic field, Tong is recognized as a scholar whose research went beyond the boundaries between the East and the West, modern and traditional," says Bao Jingmei, deputy director of the Jiushi Art Museum.

Tong (1900-83), also known as Tung Chuin, and his family kept such a low profile that his achievements were little known to the public. In fact, Jiushi Art Salon was designed by Tong and is one of the few modern-style buildings on the Bund today.

"Since the opening of the Jiushi series of art institutions five years ago, we have made it our core mission to present the cultural treasures of Shanghai and the whole world," says Bao. "This year marks the 60th anniversary of the publication of Tong's book *Jiangnan Yuanlin Zhi* (On Classical Gardens in Southeastern China), which was the first academic documentation of traditional Chinese gardens in the Yangtze River Delta area, and we believe this is a good opportunity to introduce Tong to the public," she adds.

The exhibition consists of two parts: *Grand Tour of a Chinese Architect*, which opened on Friday at Jiushi Art Museum, featuring more than 80 sketches and watercolor paintings that Tong created during a tour of Europe in 1930; and *Gardens in South-Eastern China*, running through May 21, at Jiushi Art Salon, featuring his studies of traditional gardens in the Yangtze River Delta area.

Just like his father, who was a Manchurian scholar from Shenyang, Liaoning province, Tong excelled in his studies at Tsinghua College, the predecessor of today's Tsinghua University, before furthering his studies at the University of Pennsylvania in the United States in the 1920s. He graduated with a master's degree in architecture in 1928 and went on to work in architecture firms in Philadelphia and New York. In 1930, he embarked on a four-month tour of Europe, a fairly common practice then among Eastern youths looking to broaden their horizons and better understand the world. For Tong, the period was a chance to study architectural styles in Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, as well as learn about European civilizations, says Tong Ming, curator of the exhibition and a grandson of Tong Jun.

Tong Jun created more than 300 sketches, drawings and watercolor paintings during his Europe trip in 1930. Although the artworks have never been publicly exhibited, they have always been highly recognized within the architectural community in China because of the techniques employed. In 2003, the artworks were donated to the library of Southeast University in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, where Tong Jun taught architecture after 1952.

"We borrowed them from the university and selected 80 pieces for the show," says Tong Ming, who is an architect and a professor at Southeast University.

"You will notice how his style was more conservative. The orderly depiction of the cathedrals and residences in Britain, his first stop in Europe, are a contrast to the rapid free strokes and colorful rendering of the buildings in Germany, where he was inspired by Bauhaus architecture and modern glass-structured buildings."

Tong Ming, curator of the exhibition and a grandson of Tong Jun.

If you go

10 am-6 pm, Monday-Sunday, March 18-May 21.

Gardens in South-Eastern China
Jiushi Art Salon, 1F, 230 Beijing Road East, Huangpu district, Shanghai.

Grand Tour of a Chinese Architect
Shanghai Jiushi Art Museum, 6F, No 27 East Zhongshan No 1 Road, Huangpu district, Shanghai.

Tong Jun ended his tour earlier than planned to take on the role of a teacher at Northeast University in China for an autumn semester. When the Japanese invasion forced the architecture department to dissolve, he moved to Shanghai, and together with Zhao Shen and Chen Zhi, founded a studio called Allied Architects. The studio later expanded its practice to Chongqing and Guiyang, Guizhou province.

Between 1932 and 1952, Tong Jun was involved in more than 100 projects, including the former Diplomacy Ministry building and the Capital Hotel in Nanjing, and the Metropol Cinema in Shanghai.

In 1932, Tong Jun started documenting classical gardens in the Yangtze delta region.

"He was impressed by the vigorous culture in the West, and after returning home, he was disappointed to find that classical Chinese gardens, which encapsulated the essence of traditional Chinese aesthetics and philosophy, were decaying and disappearing," Tong Ming says. "He felt obliged to document this beauty and heritage before they were completely destroyed."

Tong Jun's book marked the first time a systematic documentation of the gardens — including maps, photographs and records of the construction and inheritance — was done. While he finished writing the contents in 1937, the book was not published until 1963.

This part of his work is reflected in the exhibition at the Jiushi Art Salon. To pay homage to his grandfather's work, Tong Ming designed the exhibition space to look like a Chinese garden, complete with meandering lanes and cutout windows.

In 1946, Tong Jun began teaching architecture at the Central University in Nanjing (today's Nanjing University), and in 1952, when the country's educational institutions went through major adjustments, the architecture department became an independent institution, which is now called Southeast University where Tong Jun taught later. Tong Ming recalls his grandfather was "neither lovable, nor stern" and was always hard at work.

In the last few years of his life, Tong Jun suffered from a cancer relapse, and this left him in despair as it meant he could not complete the work he had set out to do, says his grandson.

Tong Jun and his aesthetic analysis of classical Chinese gardens influenced many important architects.

According to Wang Shu, China's first Pritzker Architecture Prize winner (widely considered the Nobel Prize for architecture), Tong Jun's argument that "taste, be it emphasized, counts here much more than mere know-how", and that's a key point in his own architectural theory. Wang says, inspired by Tong Jun, he was able to break the boundary between architecture and gardens in his designs.

Contact the writer at zhangkun@chinadaily.com.cn

Major Botticelli showcase to set records

By ZHANG KUN in Shanghai

The Italian consulate in Shanghai and Tix-Media announced on March 16 that an exhibition on Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) and other Renaissance masters will take place at the city's Bund One Art Museum from April 28 to Aug 27.

The largest Botticelli exhibition to be held in China, *Botticelli and the Renaissance*, will showcase 10 original paintings by the master and 38 by his contemporaries from the Uffizi Galleries collection in Italy. Most of the artworks will be making their first appearance in China. The important mythological painting *Pallas and the Centaur* and the biblical work *Adoration of the Magi* will be among the Botticelli pieces on show.

Xie Dingwei, general manager of Tix-Media and executive director of the Bund One Art Museum, says the most celebrated Botticelli creations — *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera* — are not permitted to leave Italy. As such, the museum requested and received authorization from the Uffizi Galleries to showcase high-definition copies of the two artworks in Shanghai. Each of the copies were made from more than 1,000 photographs of the original paintings.

"Never before have the Uffizi Galleries allowed such high-definition copies to be made for these masterpieces, and we believe it is worth the high cost to have them made in Italy and shipped to Shanghai. They will be important supplements to the treasured exhibits from there," says Xie.

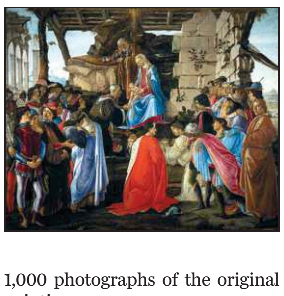
Located in Rome, the Uffizi Galleries have the largest collection of Renaissance masterpieces, and Botticelli, being a preeminent Renaissance master, had created artworks that "infiltrated our collective imagination and played an important part in our understanding of beauty, making continuous impact on our art, design and fashion", says Tiziana D'Angelo, consul general of Italy in Shanghai.

The exhibition is seen as an important project promoting cultural exchanges between China and Italy, says D'Angelo.

Apart from the Botticelli showcase, a series of other cultural events will be held this year to further enhance bilateral relations, she adds. Among the events is an Italian archaeological exhibition focused on the ancient Roman civilization. This exhibition will be held in Suzhou, Jiangsu province.

Botticelli and the Renaissance will be the second exhibition created under the agreement signed in 2021 between Tix-Media and the Uffizi Galleries. According to the agreement, the two parties will host 10 exhibitions at the Bund One Art Museum within five years.

The first exhibition of the series, *Uffizi Self-Portrait Masterpieces*, was held from Sept 9 to Jan 8, and featured 50 self-portraits of classical masters and contemporary artists.



Above: The news conference on March 16 announcing the *Botticelli and the Renaissance* exhibition will take place at Shanghai's Bund One Art Museum from April 28 to Aug 27.
Left: The biblical work *Adoration of the Magi* by Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510).
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Experts discuss recovery of cultural relics from abroad

By ZHANG KUN in Shanghai

Scholars of museums and legal studies gathered at Shanghai University on Monday and Tuesday to discuss the introduction of more progressive measures and innovative operations that would facilitate the return of illegally acquired cultural objects to their original communities.

The symposium, Museums, Decolonization and Restitution: A Global Conversation, was hosted by the International Council of Museums and Shanghai University.

Illegal trade in cultural heritage is still the third-largest illegal trade after drugs and arms smuggling in the world, according to UNESCO.

Duan Yong, vice-chancellor of Shanghai University, says there are around 15 million Chinese objects overseas, 10 percent of which were acquired illegally, mainly during the late 1800s and early 1900s.

"From 1949 to 2019, China successfully facilitated the return of more than 300 batches of cultural relics, or 150,000 pieces, through various means," he says.

In the past decade, the international museum community has witnessed a public willingness to return illegally acquired objects to their original communities, he adds.

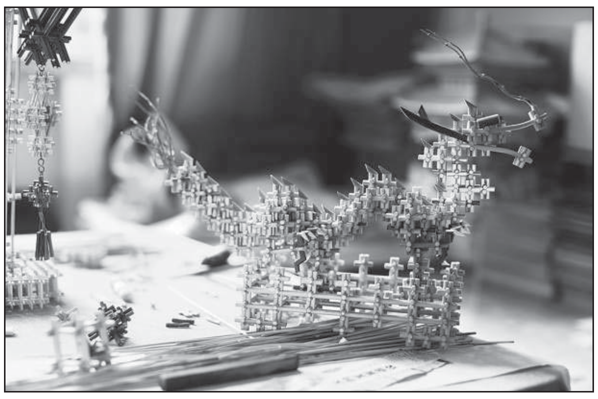
Wang Yunxia, a professor at Renmin University of China, says international agreements and "soft laws" have provided a solid legal basis for the recovery of art that was looted during World War II.

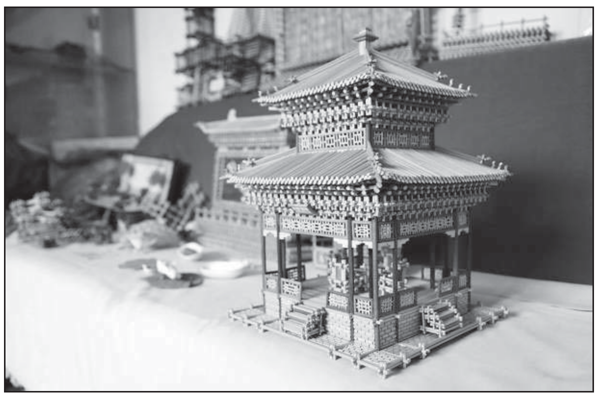
She says the "same measures and principles can be adopted and could play an important role in the recovery of cultural relics acquired from colonial areas through unjust means". She adds that legislation pertaining to the retrieval of objects lost in the past are still inadequate.

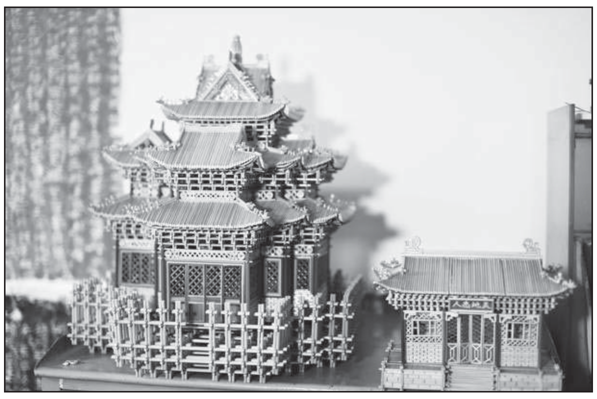
"Scholars have suggested adding new items to the amendment to claim China's legal right to overseas objects that were taken from the country illegally in the past."

Laura Evans, an associate professor at University of North Texas in the United States, says returning cultural objects to the source communities is not necessarily a loss on the part of a museum. "What the museum might have lost in the original object, they've gained in a far more worthwhile relationship for a museum in the 21st century," Evans says.

LIFE







From left: A dragon, a pavilion of the Summer Palace in Beijing, and a turret of the Palace Museum, all made with sorghum stalks by Zhao Runsheng in Jingxing mining area of Shijiazhuang, Hebei province.
PHOTOS BY GU BINJIE AND ZHANG TENGFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Attempting to build a future for his craft

Tradition inheritor longs for someone to take up the tools and follow in his footsteps, **Zhang Yu** reports in Shijiazhuang.

Craftsman Zhao Runsheng examines an article made with sorghum stalks in his studio in Jingxing mining area of Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, on Aug 30. GU BINJIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Sorghum stalks are used either as fodder, fertilizer or firewood in China's northern rural areas. But in the eyes of artisans, they are precious raw materials for making delicate handicrafts.

As you walk into the studio of Zhao Runsheng, your eyes are filled with all kinds of objects made with sorghum stalks, some placed side by side on his sofa and a nearby desk, while others hang on the wall.

Leaning against the wall in a corner are bundles of sorghum stalks of three colors — dark red, light red and yellowish white — in differing length and thickness.

Beside them sits the main stage in theater of creativity — a desk, covered by a red cloth upon which lies an uncompleted artwork, together with some stalks, a palette knife and a graver.

On a normal day, Zhao would sit at the desk and conjure up exquisite handicrafts by whittling, weaving, cutting or engraving the stalks.

The 54-year-old man is currently the only inheritor of this technique — a provincial intangible cultural heritage in Jingxing mining area of Shijiazhuang, the capital city of Hebei province in North China. It was added to the provincial intangible cultural heritage list in 2007.

Outside Zhao's studio is a room where he rests and eats when he makes time away from being surrounded by stalks.

Zhao's artistic works cover a wide range of subjects, including buildings, animals and objects like lanterns. Some standout examples of his work are an imposing and intricate model of a three-story building in the style of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), and a small, delicate and exquisite grasshopper cage.

The works are mainly sold at various exhibitions around the country, or to customers who visit him after learning about his handicraft.

Zhao had been creating stalk works as a hobby for almost two decades, before starting to dedicate himself totally to preserving and perfecting the craft in 2010.

"I sensed that the traditional handicraft might be lost forever if nobody decided to adopt it as a lifelong career," Zhao says.

Wang Li, head of the Cultural Center of Jingxing Mining Area, says that the folk custom of creating handicrafts with sorghum stalks can be traced back to the late Qing Dynasty.

Stalk items are completely handmade, and often feature specific regional characteristics.

"It has been passed down for the past century," Wang says. However, he adds, there are fewer young people interested in learning the skills and taking up the baton nowadays.

"It requires a person to concentrate their mind on studying the techniques and work with the stalks all day long," Zhao says. "It must be someone who really enjoys the craft, otherwise they won't stick with it."

Zhao was able to maintain his interest in the craft, thanks to his instructor Xu Yaode.

Xu, who passed away in 2012 at the age of 85, is the region's most outstanding inheritor of the craft techniques.

From childhood until the end of his life, Xu made objects using sorghum stalks, some of which became highly valued.

"My instructor liked weaving small objects out of the stalks when he was a child and then started learning the skills systematically from some elder craftsmen," Zhao says.

Zhao recalls that his teacher once said he made a red lantern with sorghum stalks to celebrate China's victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45).

One of Xu's representative artworks is named *Bailongbi* (Wall With Chinese Dragons).

The masterpiece is 9 meters long and 3 meters high, which has 99 flying dragons, each wearing a different expression and taking a different form.

To make them, more than 300,000 pieces of sorghum stalk were applied over more than 1 million steps. "That was the hardest work I've ever participated in creating," Zhao says, adding that his instructor, together with 12 students, one of whom was Zhao, took a year to complete it.

"The techniques required to make complicated structures with the stalks fascinated him. It seemed that he had a bond with the sorghum stalks," Zhao says.

Making the delicate stalk handicrafts is truly demanding, requiring a lot of skill, patience and effort. "From picking suitable stalks from bundles to making grooves in the stalks to attaching them to one another, every step needs not only some architectural knowledge, but also extreme care," Zhao says.

"If the grooves are not made at the right angle, the stalks will not grip each other firmly enough."

In Zhao's eyes, it's like modern toys consisting of plastic or wooden bricks and other components for children to build things with. "Though demanding, building with the stalks makes me feel like I am playing sometimes," he says.

According to Zhao, all the articles are composed of numerous mortise and tenon joints that fit together.

To ensure the best quality materials, Zhao plants his own sorghum on over 400 square meters of land in a village near his home.

"The sorghum I grow is a hybrid I discovered from my research, which yields thin but harder stalks that are perfect for me to work with," Zhao says.

Zhao is pretty proud of the quality of his stalks. "The sorghum stalk has a particularly hard skin. It's very durable and stable after it has been dried and treated," he says.

"In our mining area, the older generations always built the roofs of their houses with them. After long exposure to a dry environment, the roofs would be stronger and more durable."

Xu had more than 20 students, but after all these years, Zhao has become the only one in the area still practicing the craft.

Although currently alone in doing so, Zhao still hopes to nurture young people to carry on his legacy. He often goes to local schools to teach pupils to make simple structures with stalks, in an attempt to spark their interest.

"I hope there will be young people who fall in love with it in the future and join me to help pass on the craft," Zhao says.

Contact the writer at zhangyu1@chinadaily.com.cn

Left and above left: Zhao in the process of preparing sorghum stalks to make an article. **Above right:** Zhao learns the skills from his instructor Xu Yaode in 2008. PHOTOS BY GU BINJIE AND CHEN FENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Epic Long March concert gets Xingguo residency

By CHEN NAN
chennan@chinadaily.com.cn

The *Long March Suite*, a large-scale symphonic and choral concert, will be staged as a resident performance in Xingguo county, Jiangxi province. A new theater, Xingguo Long March Suite Grand Theater, has been built to stage the concert, which will be premiered on Thursday.

Written by Xiao Hua (1916-85) in 1965, the suite features 10 poems by Xiao about the Long March — an epic strategic retreat by the Red Army that took place from 1934 to 1936. Since its premiere in 1965, the suite has been a classic and remains popular among Chinese audiences of different ages.

"When the suite premiered in 1965, it was to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the end of the Long March. Many Chinese people grew up listening to those poems and songs. It took us over a year to prepare and arrange the concert, which will be staged as a regular show," says Jia Ding, the concert's director.

Jiangxi is known for its revolutionary bases and is a popular destination among tourists. Jia Ding adds that the regular performance of the *Long March Suite* will become a stop for tourists to better understand the history of the Communist Party of China.

Writer of the *Long March Suite*, Xiao, was born in Xingguo and became a member of the CPC as a teenager. According to Xiao Xia, Xiao Hua's daughter, her father wrote 12 poems while receiving medical treatment for a severe illness in hospital in 1965. Ten of them have been adapted into songs, composed by four veteran Chinese songwriters.

"With 680 words, my father expressed his love and respect for the Red Army soldiers who trekked over mountains and crossed rivers, with little food and evading the enemy, during the Long March from southeastern to northwestern China," says Xiao Xia, who is a member of the creative team behind the suite's upcoming resident performances in Xingguo.

"My father endured the Long March, which he described as historic and a very important part of his life. In his poems, he portrayed the heroism attributed to the Long March, which has inspired many Chinese people," she says.

Xiao Xia visited the Xingguo Revolutionary Martyrs Memorial, and was impressed by the 8-meter-high wall, comprising more than 700 pieces of black marble. On the walls of the monuments are inscribed the names of 23,179 revolutionary martyrs.

Since survivors couldn't remember or didn't even know the names of many of their deceased comrades, the actual number of martyrs from Xingguo is far beyond the number of names on the wall, she adds.

"Many soldiers died at a very young age. We particularly hope that today's young people can watch the show and learn the stories of those revolutionary martyrs, who were of a similar age as them," Xiao Xia says.

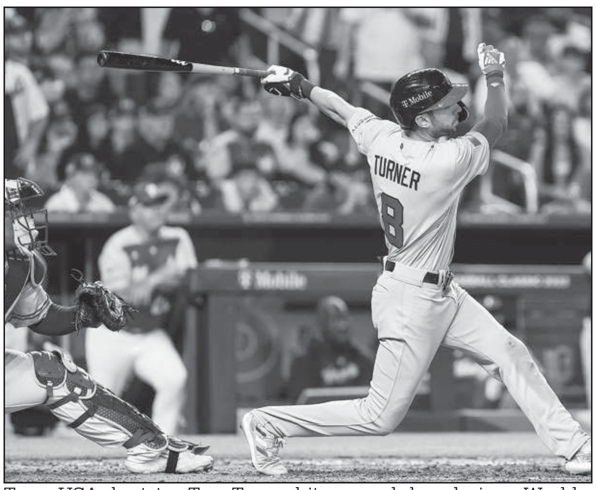
"We have recruited choral singers from Xingguo to perform in the show. The *Long March Suite* is so popular in Xingguo that many local people can sing the songs and recite the poems," Jia Ding says.

Some of the singers, who performed during the premiere in 1965, will join in the concert on Thursday. The China Film Symphony Orchestra has recorded the music, which will accompany the regular performances of the *Long March Suite* in Xingguo.

The creative team of the *Long March Suite*, a large-scale symphonic and choral concert to be staged in Xingguo county, Jiangxi province, as a regular event, launches the new show in Beijing on Monday.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

SPORTS

BASEBALL



Team USA shortstop Trea Turner hits a grand slam during a World Baseball Classic quarterfinal against Venezuela at LoanDepot Park in Miami, Florida last Saturday. USA TODAY SPORTS

Mexico fans celebrate the 5-4 win over Puerto Rico in Miami on March 17. MLB hopes Mexico's success in the World Baseball Classic will boost the game's development in the country. AP

Venezuela's Jose Altuve is struck by a pitch against the USA in Miami last Saturday. The hit broke the Houston Astros star's right thumb and he underwent surgery on Wednesday. USA TODAY SPORTS

World Classic knocks it out the park

Engrossing action and impressive revenues see tourney hailed as major success

Shohei Ohtani (center) celebrates with Japan teammates after defeating Team USA in the World Baseball Classic final on Tuesday. AP

Shohei Ohtani's strikeout of Mike Trout, Trea Turner's go-ahead, eighth-inning grand slam against Venezuela, Japan's walk-off semifinal win and Mexico's comeback from a four-run deficit against Puerto Rico will be replayed over and over.

Edwin Diaz's season-ending knee injury and Jose Altuve's broken finger will be discussed all year, too.

This year's World Baseball Classic left lasting memories, 47 games over two weeks that restored Japan's supremacy and reinforced Ohtani's unmatched ability while expanding the sport's global footprint.

While not an international fixation like soccer's World Cup, the event has grown through its five editions since launching in 2006.

"This is kind of our Olympics. We don't get that opportunity to really play wherever the Olympics are at," Kyle Schwarber said before the Americans lost to Japan 3-2 in Tuesday night's final, when Ohtani fanned Trout to seal Japan's first title since 2009 and third overall. Baseball is no longer a permanent Olympic sport, and Samurai Japan beat a US team stocked with minor-leaguers for gold when baseball was temporarily restored at the previous Games.

Played in Miami, Phoenix, Tokyo and Chinese Taipei, the star-studded WBC will finish with revenue of $90 million to $100 million, Major League Baseball said. An attendance of 1,306,414 was the tournament's highest, 20 percent over the 1,086,720 for 40 games in 2017.

The championship game on FS1, Fox Deportes and Fox Sports streaming services was the most-watched WBC game ever in the United States, up 69 percent from the 2017 final with a combined audience of 5.2 million viewers. A peak combined average audience of 6.5 million viewers tuned in for the dramatic ending.

This year's semifinals on FS1 and Fox Deportes averaged 2.4 million viewers, up 96 percent from the semis in 2017, when the tournament was televised by MLB Network and ESPN Deportes.

"One of the things that was really important this time around was Fox stepping up to broadcast the games," MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said.

"Nobody's a bigger fan of the MLB Network than I am, but when you have one of the major broadcasters step up and want the event, that's a huge deal."

Concerns about player health have followed the tourney since its inception. Many MLB teams blocked pitchers from participating, wanting them to concentrate on preparing for the season's start. Injuries to Diaz and Altuve reinforced those concerns.

But with MLB generating significant revenue and interest from the tourney, and players eager to test themselves on a global stage, the injury risks seem unlikely to slow the WBC's growth.

"We all care for each other and no one wants to get hurt," Francisco Lindor, Diaz's teammate on Team Puerto Rico and the New York Mets, told reporters Tuesday. "But we all love our countries and want to represent our countries. We have an opportunity to represent our countries and learn from our peers. It's amazing."

Japan drew three of the four most-watched WBC games ever back home going into the championship game, getting a 48.7 rating for the quarterfinal against Italy, 44.4 for the first-round game against South Korea and a 42.5 for the semifinal vs Mexico. The figures represent the percentage of television households tuned to a telecast.

The team's victory sparked a nationwide celebration back home. The country's top circulating newspaper, Yomiuri, rolled out a special Wednesday afternoon edition for commuters, usually reserved for serious matters of state, late-breaking election news, or as it was last year — the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Mexico anticipated its run to the last four will increase attention to the sport in a nation where soccer dominates.

"These two weeks are going to attract so many young players in Mexico and also Mexicans that live abroad," manager Benji Gil said.

Following an expansion from 16 entries to 20, Britain, the Czech Republic and Nicaragua reached the tournament for the first time. All failed to advance past the group phase.

China and Israel twice had games cut short by the mercy rule, and Britain and Canada one each.

Group A was so competitive that all five teams finished 2-2, resulting in Cuba and Italy advancing over the Netherlands, Chinese Taipei and Panama via a mathematical tiebreaker: runs allowed divided by outs.

"Obviously, a lot of teams are getting better at the game of baseball," US manager Mark DeRosa said.

"I thought Colombia, man, the arms they were running out there, they weren't name guys, but everyone was sitting 92 to 95 (mph, 148-153 kph) and had pretty decent stuff."

Nicaraguan pitcher Duque Hebbert even managed to turn one memorable inning into a pro contract, signing a minor-league deal with the Detroit Tigers after striking out All-Stars Juan Soto, Julio Rodriguez and Rafael Devers.

MLB and the players' association have committed to the next WBC in March 2026. Manfred said it is too early to determine whether there will be tweaks to the format.

"I think that the combination of nationalism and sport is really, really powerful," he said, "and if you have an opportunity to participate in an event that combines the two, you have to take it."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

BASKETBALL

George knee injury hits Clippers' playoff plans

LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles Clippers may be without All-Star Paul George to start the postseason.

The team said Wednesday that George has a sprained right knee and he will be reevaluated in two to three weeks' time.

The Clippers began the day in fifth place in the Western Conference with a 38-35 record. They end the regular season on April 9 at Phoenix, a team they could meet in the first round of the playoffs, which begin six days later.

Even if George recovers before the playoff opener, he'll need time to get back in the swing after not seeing game action for a couple of weeks.

George got hurt after going down hard late in a 101-100 loss to the Oklahoma City Thunder on Tuesday night. His knee made contact with the Thunder's Luguentz Dort, who was going for a rebound with 4:38 remaining.

George needed help to leave the court, appearing unable to put any weight on his right leg, and once inside the tunnel he was carried to the locker room. He later left the arena on a cart with his right leg extended. "Appreciate y'all," George tweeted on Wednesday.

Losing George for any length of

Paul George

time would be a major blow to the Clippers. He is averaging 23.8 points, 6.1 rebounds and 5.1 assists for a team that has championship aspirations.The Clippers did not practice Wednesday.

Asked Tuesday night how the team would adjust without George, Kawhi Leonard said: "Next man up. We've got a group of guys that still want to win and like to play basketball, so we'll see what happens."

The 32-year-old George has been out for extended periods of time in his career because of major injuries.

He sprained his right elbow in December 2021. A couple of weeks later, the Clippers said he suffered a torn ulnar collateral ligament in his elbow. He was out for three months and returned to play the final few weeks of the season.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Like fathers, like sons for Sweet 16 coaches

LAS VEGAS — Every day he wasn't out recruiting or away at a game, Bill Musselman wrote a message on his son's school lunch bag.

Effort, energy, enthusiasm.

The message and the relentless pursuit of perfection it implored served as the substratum of Eric Musselman's life.

"Everything that happened with my dad and I, whenever I was around him, being a competitor was kind of beyond belief," the Arkansas coach said Wednesday.

UConn coach Dan Hurley knows the feeling.

Like Musselman, he spent his childhood being told just good enough might as well be failure.

The two coaches' sons have come together in the desert, preparing for a Sweet 16 game Thursday night that will push one a step closer to college basketball's ultimate goal.

"I think being coaches' kids just gives you such a unique perspective and it makes basketball such a huge part of your life," Hurley said. "I think that's why we both coach with so much passion and we live and die with every possession."

Hurley's father, Bob, is one of the few high-school coaches to be inducted into the Naismith Hall of Fame, a hoops firebrand who led St. Anthony High School to 26 New Jersey state titles.

Dan and his brother Bobby played for their father and watched as he demanded excellence from his players on and off the court.

Bobby won two national championships as a player at Duke and is currently Arizona State's head coach.

Dan played at Seton Hall and, after stints at Wagner and Rhode Island, was tasked with rebuilding UConn back into national prominence when he was hired three years ago. The Huskies have gone to the NCAA Tournament in each of his three seasons and are one win from the program's first Elite Eight since winning the 2014 national title.

"I want to be the college version of my dad," Hurley said.

"I want to coach with integrity, be a man of my word and have the holistic type of approach that my dad had, be a coach's coach like my dad, not a phony or a fraud or a liar or a cheater."

How important has his dad been? Hurley had to compose himself for several seconds after being asked about him Wednesday in Las Vegas.

"That was a brutal last question, buddy," he said before pausing. "I'm just glad my dad's at the games."

Musselman's dad, who died at 59 in 2000 after suffering a stroke, zigzagged his way across the country coaching in the NBA, American Basketball Association, Western Basketball Association and college over four decades.

His father's travels gave the younger Musselman a unique view into the world of basketball and beyond.

Musselman went on road trips with his father, served as a ball boy for opposing teams and got to know people most kids at the time only dreamed of meeting. He absorbed his father's intensity and attention to detail, and served as an assistant under him with the NBA's Minnesota Timberwolves.

"To be able to work with him with the Timberwolves and watch his preparation, watch how he conducted practice, his attention to detail," Musselman said. "And I was lucky to watch him meet with so many other coaches in different sports. I was just exposed to a whole different lifestyle than everybody else that I grew up with."

Musselman followed his father's coaching footsteps after playing at the University of San Diego. He became head coach of the Continental Basketball Association's Rapid City Thrillers at age 24 and later coached the NBA's Sacramento Kings and the Golden State Warriors.

Intrigued by the prospect of coaching in college, Musselman wanted to learn from the ground level, so he took jobs as an assistant at Arizona State and LSU. He was clearly ready once he became a head coach, leading Nevada to three straight NCAA Tournament appearances, including a run to the 2018 Sweet 16.

Musselman has had even sweeter success in Fayetteville. He led the Razorbacks to the Elite Eight in his second season and returned there last year. He is seeking a third straight appearance in a regional final.

That run seemed to be headed toward an end this season when Trevon Brazile tore his ACL and five-star freshman Nick Smith Jr. was limited by knee injuries.

The Razorbacks rallied just like their tenacious coach, pulling off a win over No 1 seed Kansas that Musselman celebrated with his shirt off.

"We just kept kind of grinding and looking at the next game on our schedule and trying to have belief," Musselman said. "And here we are again. It's a resilient team that's overcome a lot for sure."

Just like its coach — and UConn's.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

SPORTS

SOCCER

Team China's new dawn off to dour start

Coach Jankovic kicks off reign with goalless draw against 10-man Kiwis

By SHI FUTIAN
shifutian@chinadaily.com.cn

Aleksandar Jankovic's reign as Team China head coach got off to a lackluster start in a 0-0 draw with New Zealand in Auckland on Thursday.

Tasked with reviving the beleaguered national team's fortunes after being appointed last month, the Serbian was aiming for victory in his first match in charge to get the new era off to a positive start.

However, it was a familiar tale of a lack of guile and composure up front for Team China as the visitor failed to capitalize on the 63rd-minute sending-off of New Zealand stalwart Tommy Smith. China's struggles to retain possession in midfield, even with its second-half numerical advantage, also did not inspire confidence.

"We withstood huge pressure in the first half, and the red card presented us with a great opportunity to win. It's such a pity that we failed to convert our chances," said Team China captain Wu Xi.

"Actually it was a great atmosphere here. We haven't played a game like this for a long time. I really want to thank the fans for their support. We need to review where we went wrong and prepare better for the next friendly."

Jankovic's squad will take on New Zealand again on Sunday, and Thursday's performance has kept any expectations of a Team China win in check.

The match generated a number of trending topics on Chinese social media. The hashtag "Team China vs New Zealand" was viewed over 12 million times within two hours of kickoff as curious fans watched to see if Jankovic could make any difference to the struggling squad.

Fans were at least happy to see Team China display some fighting spirit on Thursday, however the players' lack of quality on the ball was again glaringly obvious, with some supporters also questioning the team's fitness levels.

It's clear that Jankovic will not be able to transform this squad overnight.

"In terms of the world rankings, Team China is currently at No 80, while New Zealand is at 105. However, New Zealand looked a stronger outfit than the Chinese squad. Many of the current New Zealand internationals play in major European leagues," read a commentary by ThePaper.cn.

After Team China's failure to qualify for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, this was the first appearance on the international stage since then for many of the Chinese squad's core players.

And while a win again proved elusive, some fans took consolation in avoiding a defeat.

According to Titan Sports, the Team China fans in New Zealand created a passionate atmosphere for the friendly. The four sections dedicated to visiting supporters in the 30,000-capacity stadium were all sold out.

Under-23s lose

Earlier in the day, China's Under-23s lost 2-0 to their New Zealand counterparts in another friendly played in Auckland.

The Chinese came into the game with high hopes of a win, however the host took advantage of the visitor's sluggish attack and leaky defense to prevail.

Like the senior squads, both sides will face off again on Sunday.

"I think the biggest problem is that we are not confident enough, and we failed to reproduce what we'd done in training. We should have delivered a better performance," said China Under-23 defender Wu Shaocong.

"And we are still not so familiar with the coach. It will take time for us to gel. On the pitch, I felt that our players weren't at 100 percent. We were not brave enough, and didn't show what we can do, and eventually we ran out of time and options on the pitch."

The under-23 squad, which will represent China at the Asian Games in Hangzhou this summer, was coached by Jankovic before the 50-year-old took the senior reins in February. Another Serbian, Dejan Djurdjevic, is now in charge of the under-23s.

"The two head coaches are both very passionate, and they both emphasize the details. Off the pitch, they are strict with us. But each has a different tactical approach, so we are still adjusting," said under-23 goalkeeper Han Jiaqi.

"We still need to improve in attack, which we have prioritized in training. Hopefully in the next friendly we can show the detailed work we've done on this.

"I also met our old coach Jankovic in the hotel. We said hello to each other. And I just want to wish him the best of luck with the national team in the future."

Team China forward Wu Lei tries to dribble away from New Zealand midfielder Matt Garbett during Thursday's friendly in Auckland, New Zealand. The match ended 0-0. AP

TENNIS

China's Wu Yibing returns to Britain's Kyle Edmund during their first-round match at the Miami Open in Florida on Wednesday. The 23-year-old Wu advanced 7-5, 7-5 and will next play No 31 seed Diego Schwartzman of Argentina. AP

Chinese aces master Miami rivals

By SUN XIAOCHEN
sunxiaochen@chinadaily.com.cn

The resurgence of Chinese tennis continued on the elite global stage on Wednesday, with Wu Yibing and Wang Xinyu registering notable wins in the men's and women's draws respectively at the Miami Open.

Six years since his debut at the event as a 17-year-old qualifier, China's top men's player Wu celebrated his return to the ATP Masters tournament with his first main-draw win in Miami. The gutsy victory over Britain's Kyle Edmund was even more commendable considering Wu overcame some sloppy play at the tail end of both sets.

It was Wu's third career singles triumph at a top-flight 1000 tournament, extending his record as the winningest Chinese man at that level.

"I started well in both sets, trying to attack more on his backhand, hitting returns deep to that side knowing that his forehand is the weapon. I did a good job trying to dictate the play as much as I could," Wu said after his 7-5, 7-5 win over Edmund, who reached a career-high ranking of No 14 in 2018.

Riding the momentum of his first ATP Tour title at last month's Dallas Open, Wu broke the South African-born Briton four times to race into a 5-2 lead, in both sets. However, serving at 5-3 in the second, he let slip an opportunity to close out the match, resulting in a string of unforced errors as Edmund tied the set. Wu later attributed those wobbles to being "overhasty".

"I was in too much of a rush to finish well, trying too hard to win as quickly as possible, so I lost focus and it affected my shots, resulting in bad serves, combined with rushed second shots one after another," Wu said.

Wu's poise and ability to adjust, though, have improved massively over the last year, with the 23-year-old baseliner able to step up his game on clutch points and fend off a resurgent Edmund in one hour and 35 minutes.

"Hopefully, I can do better mentally next time," said Wu, who has secured seven wins out of eight tour-level matches this season.

Next up for Wu is a second-round meeting with Argentina's Diego Schwartzman. A former world No 8, Schwartzman has been struggling to find top form this year but is still a major obstacle to Wu's hopes of reaching the third round at this level for the first time.

"Maybe he is not at his best recently but anyone who has made it here shouldn't be taken lightly," Wu said of his encounter against the 31st seed on Friday. "He is a very special player, playing at an incredibly fast pace. He's been around the top of the tour for so many years for a reason. I will prepare for him as thoroughly as possible."

Wang Xinyu reacts to a point during her win. USA TODAY SPORTS

Earning 25 points for his first-round win, Wu has climbed to a career-high singles ranking of No 57 in the world — a remarkable feat considering this time last year he was No 1,869.

Earlier, in the women's draw, rising Chinese star Wang Xinyu fought back from a set down to defeat Anna-Lena Friedsam of Germany, 3-6, 6-4, 6-2.

Wang, who is making her debut at the WTA 1000 tournament, set up a second-round clash with Czech former world No 1 Karolina Pliskova on Friday.

For the first time in its history, the premier WTA event in Miami will feature five Chinese women in the second round, including another first-round winner, Wang Xiyu, who beat Brenda Fruhvirtova in straight sets on Tuesday. Three higher-ranked Chinese players — Zheng Qinwen, Zhang Shuai and Zhu Lin — were all awarded first-round byes.

The flurry of successes has revived fond memories of the so-called "Golden Flower" era over a decade ago, when Chinese fans witnessed major breakthroughs by the likes of two-time Grand Slam singles winner Li Na and major doubles champions Zheng Jie and Yan Zi.

"I think we have a better understanding of professional tennis and more resources to lean on than the previous generation, thanks to their efforts. We are committed to picking up the baton to keep producing surprises," Zhu said last month after winning her maiden WTA title in Thailand.

SOCCER

United suitors jostle as sale heats up

MANCHESTER, United Kingdom — The battle to buy Manchester United heated up on Wednesday as Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim Bin Hamad Al Thani and British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe prepared to raise their bids for the 20-time English champion.

Both parties were expected to increase their initial offers after the submission deadline of 2100 GMT was extended by merchant bank Raine, which is assisting with the sale of the club, following confusion over the timing, the BBC reported.

Sky Sports also reported that Sheikh Jassim and Ratcliffe had been granted extensions to submit fresh bids.

The new deadline for offers has not been made clear, according to the BBC.

United's owners, the Glazer family, have reportedly set a world-record 6-billion-pound ($7.3-billion) valuation for a sports club.

Sheikh Jassim's bid for 100 percent control of the club promises to wipe United's $620 million debt and invest in a new stadium and training ground, in addition to backing for the men's and women's teams.

A source close to Sheikh Jassim's bid told AFP he remains confident his bid is "the best for the club, fans and local community".

INEOS chemical company founder Ratcliffe, a boyhood United fan, has been more circumspect in his assessment, insisting he will not pay a "stupid" price in a bidding war for one of soccer's most iconic clubs.

"How do you decide the price of a painting? How do you decide the price of a house? It's not related to how much it cost to build or how much it cost to paint," Ratcliffe told the Wall Street Journal this week.

"What you don't want to do is pay stupid prices for things because then you regret it subsequently."

Ratcliffe, who wants the 69 percent stake owned by the Glazer family, said his interest in United would be "purely in winning things", calling the club a "community asset".

Deeply unpopular with supporters since they saddled the club with debt in a 790-million-pound leveraged takeover in 2005, the Glazers appeared ready to cash out at an enormous profit when they invited external investment in November.

However, they could yet shun the option of selling a controlling stake in the club, with other parties interested in a minority shareholding.

The initial offers from the first round of bidding last month were believed to have been worth around 4.5 billion pounds.

That would surpass the Premier League record of 2.5 billion pounds paid for Chelsea last year by a consortium led by LA Dodgers co-owner Todd Boehly and private equity firm Clearlake Capital, with a further 1.75 billion pounds promised in investment in infrastructure and players.

Bidders are expected to hear from United next week, with another round of bidding still in play.

If one bid is vastly ahead of the others, it could be chosen to enter a period of exclusivity, which would allow further negotiation ahead of a final sale.

Status symbol

Ratcliffe visited Old Trafford last Friday along with INEOS representatives, a day after a delegation from Sheikh Jassim's group toured the club's stadium and training ground to hold more talks as part of their due diligence.

Just months after hosting the 2022 World Cup, a successful Qatari bid would give the Gulf state pride of place in the Premier League — the world's most-watched domestic competition.

But it would also be controversial, given the international political element.

Sheikh Jassim is the son of former Qatari prime minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani, and his close links to the Gulf state's ruling elite would raise questions over another Premier League club becoming a state-backed project.

Premier League champion Manchester City's fortunes have been transformed since a takeover from Sheikh Mansour, a member of Abu Dhabi's ruling family in 2008.

In 2021, the Saudi sovereign wealth fund bought a controlling stake in Newcastle.

Critics have called on the Premier League to tighten ownership rules.

United, a three-time European champion, hasn't won the Premier League since legendary manager Alex Ferguson led it to a 20th English title in his final season before retiring in 2013.

But it is enjoying a renaissance under Erik ten Hag's management this season and ended a six-year trophy drought by lifting the League Cup last month.

AFP